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**Alien
Nation**

• Wild Times with a •

Fake Fake

Princess

Story by Ichiro Sakaki
Art by Kaori Fujita

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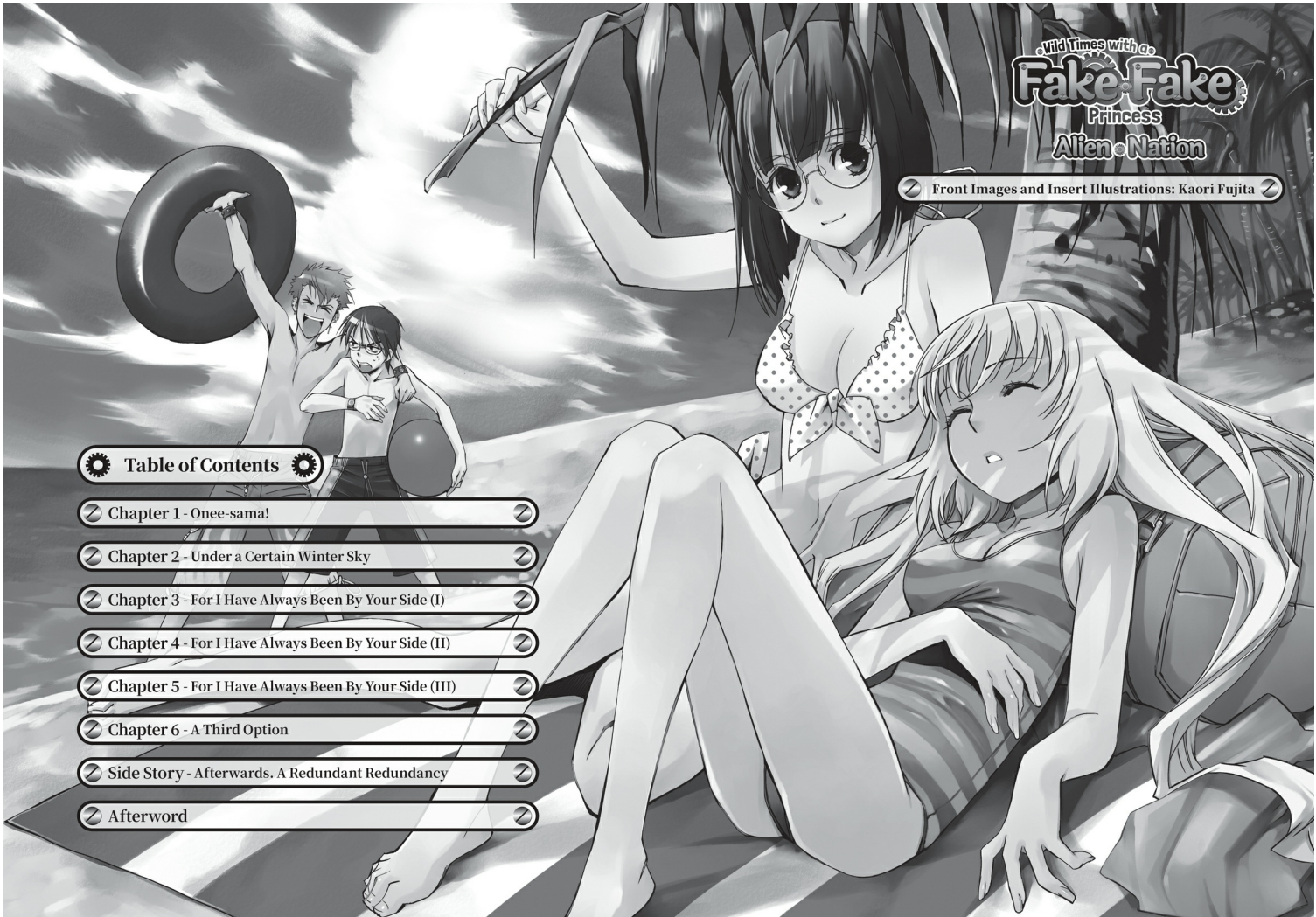
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Wild Times with a
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Alien Nation

Front Images and Insert Illustrations: Kaori Fujita

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Character

Kyouhei Nanbu

An unfortunate (?) youth who dreams of peace, yet is denied by his circumstances. He's currently living as Pamil's elder brother and trying to make a 'normal family.'



Sanae Murata

A cringey... or rather, cringing girl that longs for Kyouhei. Her hobby is magic (actually, just curses). She is rather attractive if you look closely at her though...



Shuuhei Nanbu

Kyouhei's father, an International Trader lurking behind the scenes everywhere. Rather abnormal.

Pamil (Harumi Nanbu)

A self-proclaimed princess' body double android. According to her, her formal name is FR-MC09 'Pamil IX.' She's currently attending school as Kyouhei's sister, Harumi Nanbu. She has lots of special moves, like the ability to shoot beams from her eyes or the Royal Thunder.



Youko Minebe

Sanae's friend, and the exact opposite of her: she's bright and cheery.



Kaoruko Houwa

The proprietress of the Corvette café. Kyouhei often consults with this mysterious woman.



Mizuhito Hibiki

Kyouhei's friend, who lives for the spotlight.

Chapter 1 - Onee-sama!

It was an early Sunday morning, 6:54 a.m.

“...Any minute now,” Kyouhei Nanbu mumbled to himself, checking the time on his phone. It had been about half an hour since he’d lit the oil stove already. And if he were being honest, he’d admit it was the fifth time he’d checked the time and said that.

Steam was spewing from the kettle on the stove as it warmed up. Everything was ready: the cups had a teabag, sugar cube, and spoon inside them. The only thing left was to add the hot water, and that had been the case for some time now. There was a simple breakfast for two ready on the table: croissants, sliced cheese, ham, and a salad for each person.

There was only one thing missing—the people to eat it.

Kyouhei checked his phone for the sixth time.

“I have returned, Kyouhei,” came a voice just as he did so.

When Kyouhei turned to look... there was a slight figure standing before him.

The figure was a foreign girl, wearing a white, woolen duffel coat. Her hair shone like spun gold, and her eyes were like glittering sapphires. Her skin was a milky-white and her features were faultless—all of these things came together wonderfully.

She was adorable, beautiful. It was impossible to argue; she was just that perfect. The simple act of her standing there changed the very feeling of the atmosphere, like an elegant scene in a movie.

Her name was Pamil Terrill Karl Bergmann.

If she was silent, and still as well, she was an utterly peerless beauty.

“Welcome back,” Kyouhei said, smiling reluctantly at her extravagance and pouring water into the cups.

A lot of time had passed since certain circumstances had led to her becoming

his sister. As things stood in the beginning, there were plenty of things that threw him for a loop, and even now they still came up. Her behavior was still fairly bizarre, but Kyouhei had become much more used to his blonde sister, so now he just saw it as normal.

“Here,” he told her, holding out the cup to her.

“Oh, how considerate,” she said, taking the cup with a nod.

Regardless of her being his younger sister, she often spoke more haughtily than needed, but that was a constant. It was only natural for an eccentric (in several ways) who introduced herself as a body double android of a ruined country’s princess.

Incidentally, she had just returned from a morning walk.

Originally, he was uneasy about letting her out alone due to her oddness. Even so, Kyouhei couldn’t keep her under surveillance... with all of her oddities, it would mentally exhaust him. All that meant that, recently, he let her go for walks on Sunday mornings on her own.

“Morning walks are good,” she declared, cupping her drink in both hands as she sipped at it, “they wake you up and whet your appetite.”

“Right,” Kyouhei answered with a reluctant smile as they both sat at the table.

Thus, the Nanbu household’s breakfast scene had been completed. Well, the ‘little sister’ was a blonde-haired, blue-eyed foreigner, but that was nothing to complain about—Kyouhei luxuriated in the somehow heartwarming atmosphere that filled the air.

I do still need to keep an eye on her... he thought as he watched her eat like a hamster, croissant in both hands as she nibbled away at it. *...But she finally feels like family.*

Kyouhei had only ever had his father who he could call family. He didn’t know who or where his mother was. Even his father was rarely around, so he’d always yearned for a family.

His life with Pamil, ridiculously as it had started, had finally approached his ideal. Ordinary, normal, reasonable. It was a naturally normal life. Well, his

family was mainly composed of the two of them, and his sister was obviously a foreigner, and on top of that, she would sometimes fire beams from her eyes... but well, he'd just have to deal with that.

Regardless, Kyouhei had now finally sunk his teeth into his normalish everyday life.

However...

"You enjoying school then?" Kyouhei asked her.

"Indeed, I am. Why are you asking me again?"

"It's fine. It's a normal family conversation."

"It is?"

"It is."

...Kyouhei would soon come to realize that this normalcy was built upon sand.

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It was an exceedingly eye-catching sight.

Thus, it was only to be expected that Mizuhito Hibiki would stop to take a look. Standing out—that is, deviating from the norm and the expected—was his lifeblood; the philosophy by which he led his life.

He had scarlet hair, emerald eyes, and tanned skin. He also had a design on his cheek; some sort of tattoo. His appearance was abnormal for a human being, but he was still a Japanese person. Mizuhito's hair was dyed with spray and his eyes colored with contacts—all to stand out. Nothing more, nothing less.

How such a guy became Kyouhei Nanbu's friend was shrouded in mystery, but back to the point.

"...What?"

Currently... Mizuhito was on an artificial beach.

Even sandy beaches, thronged with surfers in the summer, grew empty as the cold intensified; the early hour simply exaggerated the effect. The chill winter wind tugged at the waves breaking on the beach, carrying the gentle, and

somehow sad, rumble of the sea with it. The scenery seemed to lack color; almost everything appeared to be a shade of gray.

Mizuhito was out running—the faux-rocker never missed the exercise to stay healthy. He kept away from tobacco, alcohol, and drugs, too. Standing out was surprisingly tiring work, so he didn't spare the effort. "Swans are kicking away under the water, yeah?!" he'd ask you, "It's the same as that!"

There were a few flaws in his reasoning, but back to the point.

"A... coffin...?"

Indeed, there it was, completely heedless of the harmony of its surroundings, or the context it was in. The thing in front of him could be described in no other way: it was a long black box.

It didn't have a Christian cross engraved on it or anything, but even so... The ominous black color and its roughly two-meters of length, along with its 70-centimeter width, just seemed to scream that a person was lying down inside. Without a doubt, it was the spitting image of a Western coffin. On top of all that, it was lying on an artificial beach, so it was a rather surreal sight.

"Did it float in from somewhere...?"

The internet said that the sea around the beach didn't have too much marine life in it, so it shouldn't have washed up considering its size...

"...A coffin..." he breathed with a gulp, staring at the black cuboid; a box that might have contained a corpse inside. "If I open it... there might be a body..."

He was silent... for almost five seconds.

"I'm pumped!" he cried, thrusting his fist into the air.

If Kyouhei had been around, he would have collapsed on the sand.

"It'll be in the paper! 'Local Runner Discovers Coffin from Abroad!' I'll stand out! I'll stand out so hard! Hell yeah!"

His idea completely lacked any respect for the dead. However, Mizuhito made it his policy that he'd sell his parents to stand out, so applying half-baked common decency to him was pointless.

There was no one on the beach to call him on his heresy either, so Mizuhito happily pulled out his phone.

“Right then! Let’s call the newspapers, the tabloids... Oh yeah, the cops, too. Ah, I should take a picture to prove I found it first!” He hadn’t even the slightest inclination to call the police first, so he was beyond help. “Yeah!”

Mizuhito put his left hand on the coffin, and then held his right hand out as far as possible, like he was taking a selfie with a girl, pointing the lens towards them.

But then...

“...Huh?” he said, finally noticing that the black coffin had some machinery and countless pipes across its side. “What? It’s not a coffin?”

There must have been some reason for it.

Mizuhito wasn’t given the time to think about it though. Suddenly, a rumbling and clattering of machinery started up, along with the beeping of an alarm... Then, some white smoke, maybe steam, started gushing out of the coffin.

“Uwah! Wha—What the hell?!”

Mizuhito staggered back, white smoke blasting into his face. The shock sent him into a tailspin. Before his bewildered gaze, the lid began to open out to the left and right, like it was a door.

And then...

Haltingly, a swaying figure stood behind the smoke.

It was like a scene right out of a movie, when some evil mummy was revived by an ignorant modern-day person.

The figure turned to face him. They approached him, pushing through the smoke...

“*Schwester!*” they yelled, in German for some reason.



The winter season didn’t necessarily mean that the temperature would stay low throughout the whole day. As the sun rose, it brought warmth with it to the

city.

Kyouhei and Pamil were walking together, a slight breeze carrying that mild warmth. They were heading for the Corvette. Most of the time, Kyouhei cooked for the two of them, but they also went out to eat like this occasionally.

However...

The scene Kyouhei faced as he turned a corner made him stop on the spot.

The street they were coming into was fairly close to the shopping district, and a bizarre girl was standing there.

She wore a black dress and long black gloves, with black frills. She also had a silver chain around her neck, with a skull dangling from it. Her feet were in long stiletto heels. Her hair was pitch-black, but dyed crimson partway down its length in a gradient.

The whole outfit was somewhere between gothic and punk, but not quite right for either, or at least that's what Kyouhei felt.

Well, the existence of an eccentric like that was fine. Everyone had their hobbies, and whatever they wore was no reason for Kyouhei to be concerned.

Still, looking her in the eye was a different matter.

No, he cried mentally, feeling like he was staring down a wild animal in the mountains. *I need to look away...*

"Kyouhei!" the girl called to him, heedless of his worries, pumping a fist cheerily into the air. Not only had she called to him, but she'd also used his name.

"Wha—" Kyouhei managed, stiffening as he felt the passersby recoil from him.

Why does she know my name?!

"Hey, if it isn't you!" she cried.

"No... um... huh? You're talking to me?!"

Unconcerned with Kyouhei's panic, the girl flounced over. As she did, he could feel the stares around him intensify.

“Do you know her?” Pamil asked. That question, coupled with her curious expression, was enough to tell him that the girl had nothing to do with Pamil.

“Umm, who are you?!” he asked, looking at her as she approached.

Well... she wasn't bad looking. She was a bit dull, so you couldn't call her a beauty, though. The tribal design on her cheek lent a bit of an avant-garde accent to her looks... huh?

Kyouhei suddenly felt the blood leave his face.

He recognized that design.

The girl slapped Kyouhei's shoulder companionably as he stood stock still, uncomprehending, or maybe refusing to accept the situation.

“Hey, you heading out shopping?”

“You... Mizuhito?!” Kyouhei cried out.

“Yo, I'm Mizuhito-chaaan.”

“The hell are you wearing?!” Kyouhei demanded an answer. “Seriously, the fuck?! I knew you were an idiot, but I didn't think you'd go fucking crossdressing at midday on a Sunday—”

“It's not that rare in Akiba,” Mizuhito defended.

“Shut your face, you crappy otaku!”

“No, you see,” Mizuhito continued, no shame visible, “it turns out I'm actually... an onee-sama!”



Kyouhei just stared wordlessly at the illogical sentence that had just left Mizuhito's mouth. He had no idea how to respond.

The second hand of the clock had finished a revolution before he finally managed to open his mouth: "Uh... what did you just say?"

"I said that I'm actually an onee-sama," Mizuhito repeated, arms folded and nodding.

"Mizuhito..." Kyouhei muttered, pressing his fingers to his forehead. "I see... that's what it is."

"That's what it is."

"The illness... has finally hit your brain...!"

"I didn't know either until a bit ago," Mizuhito continued, ignoring Kyouhei as the latter searched for a neurologist's phone number. "On my run this morning..."

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"*Schwester!*" cried a girl in German, clinging on to Mizuhito.

The term 'little girl' might be more effective in conveying her appearance than simply 'girl.'

She was probably around ten. Even if she was baby-faced and looked younger than she actually was, she couldn't be more than fifteen.

Her sparkling gold hair fell in a short bob cut, covering her cheeks. Her eyes were her most blatant feature, seeming to fill her face, like pools of sky-blue sapphires. Her skin was a porcelain white.

The lines of her body emphasized her lack of development... but when coupled with her adorable features, they lent an otherworldly, innocent feeling to her appearance. If there were white wings on her back, you'd be forgiven for thinking her an angel.

Indeed, the girl now tightly holding on to Mizuhito was as she had been born... So stark naked, basically. With how clearly young she was, the scene certainly seemed like a crime.

*"Ahh, schwester schwester schwester schwester schwester schwester
schwester schwester schwester schwester schwester schwester schwester
schwester schwester schwesterrrrr!"* the girl continued (still in German), rubbing
her face against him as she tightened her grip.

“Ahn, what a wonderful sen—no,” Mizuhito let out, an expression of ecstasy making its way onto his face before he came to his senses. “What was that?”

His brow had furrowed at the unfamiliar language. He got fairly decent grades, but German was out of a high schooler's wheelhouse.

“What language is that?” he asked again. “It wasn’t English.”

The girl fell silent and looked up at him, her eyebrows crinkling.

“...I see, you’re saying that when in Rome, one should do as the Romans do. So you’re telling me I should use Japanese as this is Japan. Correct, Onee-sama?” she asked after a brief pause.

“Well, we are in Japan... Wait, ‘Onee-sama’?”

“Indeed,” the girl nodded, “I, FR-MC10 ‘Lorie III,’ have longed for the day I could meet you, Onee-sama! Our base designs are the same, so we’re a literal sister series! And as the body double android for the first princess of the Bergmann Kingdom, and the body double android for the second princess, you’re my onee-sama in two ways!” the girl explained.

She didn't realize, though, either through poor eyesight or poor faculties, that she was explaining this to the wrong person.

And thus, with a horrified expression, Mizuhito began to groan: “I... was an onee-sama?!”

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“And that’s how I awoke to the truth,” Mizuhito declared, his fist clenched. “I decided that if I was an onee-sama, I should live my life in that way!”

“Just drop dead ten times,” Kyouhei said with a long sigh. “Turning up in drag is one thing, but why the gothic look?”

“Because I’m an onee-sama. In these clothes, you could also use ‘aneki’ for an energetic, sporty impression, or a relaxe—”

“You just got dragged into a fantasy by some girl you’ve never even seen before. Anyway, a naked girl popping out a coffin, speaking German... and saying... she’s a body double... an...droid...”

A feeling of déjà vu suddenly forced Kyouhei into silence. Turning to his side, he saw that even Pamil had folded her arms in apparent thought, as if she had likewise had a realization.

A naked girl coming out of a coffin wouldn’t be a common occurrence. And she called herself a Bergmann too, so it was hard to consider it a coincidence.

“Pamil,” he said, “do you think...”

“Indeed...” she nodded thoughtfully, “it might just be in vogue.”

“Vogue?!” Kyouhei yelled.

“It was a joke.”

“A joke? You seriously said that as a joke?!” he demanded.

“I can’t say for sure without seeing her, but from what I’ve heard, it seems reasonable to assume she is one of the androids constructed as a sister-machine to me. Princess Pamil did indeed have a younger sister in Princess Lorie. It wouldn’t be strange for her to also have a body double,” Pamil continued, unconcerned with Kyouhei’s stricken expression.

“When you put it like that, it sounds like it’s the first time you’re even hearing about it,” Kyouhei said. If his conjecture was correct, then this Lorie would indeed be Pamil’s younger sister.

But...

“It is,” she answered bluntly. “Isn’t it obvious? A machine wouldn’t have the serial numbers of later installments, even in the same series, in its database, would it?”

Well, assuming her claims of android-hood were true, the logic at least followed.

“But... actually, wait. In that case, why did she decide Mizuhito was her ‘Onee-sama’?”

“Hmm, well, this is just an assumption...” Pamil began, her head tilted in thought, “but it was probably her imprinting.”

“What are you lot, ducks?!”

Ignoring Kyouhei’s quip, she continued: “Well, with what my memory data holds, Princess Lorie was always clinging to Princess Pamil. Princess Pamil also spoiled her, and they were always together, so she might have been set to designate whoever she first saw as her elder sister?”

“Not her parent?”

“Well, the royal family was always busy running the country, so the only time parents and children saw each other was essentially during morning and evening greetings,” Pamil explained. “Princess Pamil was the closest to a guardian that Princess Lorie had.”

Pamil was speaking casually, but it was a rather sad tale. Apparently, being royalty didn’t mean that you were blessed in every way, though that was obvious.

“Kyouhei, what are you both talking about?” Mizuhito asked, leaning forward in interest.

“Ah, nothing you need to worry about,” he answered.

He’d been careless due to the shock, but Mizuhito didn’t know about Pamil declaring herself an android.

Pamil drew attention at the best of times, so her being known as a bit of an eccentric would stand out all the more. Considering the number of things in their home that should stay hidden, he wanted to avoid any more scrutiny, so he kept all of that secret as much as possible.

“Mizuhito,” Pamil said, grabbing the skull around his neck and pulling him level with her, “where is that Lorie III?”

“Huh? She’s right he—” he started, pointing off.

Standing there was a small girl wearing just a tracksuit top and an angry expression. “Onee-sama!” she yelled.



A few moments earlier, on the landing of a nearby building's fire escape.

"What's that?" mumbled a figure watching the shopping district through binoculars. They were referring to a group walking through the street full of shops.

They wore a suit, tie, felt hat, and sunglasses. Everything they wore was black, so in a phrase, they had the *Men in Black* look.

The outfit was certainly one a boorish man would wear while stalking and then kidnapping their target... but the person looking through the binoculars was a young girl with short, fiery-red hair in a bob cut.

"What's up, Emmitt?" asked a woman with the same hair color, but long, as she munched on an anko bun she had bought at a convenience store.

Hesitantly, the woman called Emmitt started speaking as she peered through the binoculars: "Sis, there's a strange person near the observation target?"

"It's not Kyouhei Nanbu, Shuuhei Nanbu, Sanae Murata, or Youko Minebe?" the long-haired woman asked, frowning as she stuffed her bun back into its wrapper. "Also, Emmitt, I've told you not to call me that on the job."

She tossed the bun back into the bag to her side and took out an SLR camera with a telephoto lens. She zoomed in on the observation target, Pamil, and Kyouhei Nanbu, who acted as her guardian.

"...She certainly is weird," she admitted.

Apparently, Kyouhei Nanbu knew the girl, as he was shouting angrily at her.

"What do we do, Elsia?" asked Emmitt with a confused expression.

"Well... if they're acquaintances, we'll need to run some checks."

"Checks and everything... we don't even know how related they are."

They didn't even know why the Colonel who was backing them was interested in Pamil either. They were aware that the lightning, fire, and other such events were abnormal. She was just one person, though, not something to create a big political upheaval over, and so they couldn't think of a reason to justify sending personnel over to this backwater nation in the far east.

What on earth did they want with her? Without knowing that, spending so much time monitoring her was far too inefficient.

But...

“Emmitt, we take the money, we investigate, and then we report.”

“I suppose so. But seriously, though... what are we doing...?” Emmitt muttered nonchalantly, pulling a CalorieMate from her pocket and chewing it.

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“You ruffian! Unhand my Onee-sama!” cried a girl, her shapely eyebrows bristling.

She was blonde-haired, blue-eyed, and pale-skinned.

With her features mostly being similar to Pamil’s, but smaller, you’d accept it if you were told they were siblings.

However...

“She’s...?” Kyouhei murmured with a confused expression. The girl’s expression of rage was aimed towards Pamil, who had Mizuhito’s collar, or more accurately, the skull hanging from his neck. “...Hey, Pamil. Whether she’s your sister or not, she seriously thinks Mizuhito is her sister?”

“Hmm?”

The intent to physically separate the two was written all over the little girl’s face. “Unhand my Onee-sama!” she demanded.

“Um, young lady,” Kyouhei entreated, holding a hand up to his forehead to stave off the headache.

“I’m not a young lady! My name is Lorie—”

“That perv isn’t your sister,” he interrupted her.

“...Huh?”

“He’s a guy. Men can’t be sisters. And he’s completely Japanese as well.”

The girl, Lorie, blinked her big blue eyes several times. “Y-You...” she began, poking Mizuhito repeatedly with a trembling finger, a horrified expression on

her face, “You’re not my onee-sama!”

“You should have noticed already!” Kyouhei couldn’t help but yell.

“I can’t believe you would deceive me like this!” she cried at Mizuhito.

“You just made assumptions!” Kyouhei yelled, again unable to help himself, before sighing and continuing: “Anyway, why did you even think he was your sister?”

“Because the first thing I saw when the lid was opened had to be my onee-sama.”

“Indeed, imprinting,” said Pamil, folding her arms and nodding as Kyouhei remained speechless.

“Don’t be so proud of yourself,” he told her.

“If this isn’t my onee-sama...” she wondered, chewing her finger in thought for about ten seconds before suddenly looking up at Kyouhei and Pamil. “...It can’t be!”

“Yeah, it is,” Kyouhei said in annoyance.

The reunion between the sisters—or something like that—had finally happened, though Kyouhei could feel more chaos looming, but let’s ignore that.

Either way, they couldn’t leave a small girl like that with no guardian.

Although, if she was of the same ilk as Pamil, it wouldn’t be the girl who was in danger, but everyone else around her.

“Ahh... Onee-sama,” she uttered, putting her hands together as if praying, overcome with emotion.

She’d been absolutely dying to meet her ‘onee-sama,’ just as Pamil had suggested.

Then...

“I finally found you!” she cried, launching into a hug.

“...What?”

...A hug aimed at Kyouhei.

“Ah, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama!”

She snuggled and snuggled her face into his stomach, at an angle that would have been somewhat risky if she had horns.

“Wha... What?!”

“Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-samaaaaa!”

Snuggle snuggle.

“Hey! Wait—”

“Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhh, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama!”

Snuggle snuggle snuggle.

Well, Lorie was shouting in ecstasy, and completely not hearing Kyouhei’s voice.

“Oh, so Kyouhei was her onee-sama. I didn’t see that coming,” Mizuhito concluded with a nod, watching the situation.

Prompting...

“You morooooooooon!” yelled Kyouhei, obviously.

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“Elsia,” murmured Emmitt, looking through the binoculars.

“What?”

“There’s another one of them. She looks similar too.”

Of course, looking through the telephoto lens, Elsia could also see the blonde-haired, blue-eyed girl who was Pamil’s spitting image.

“Should we report that too?” Emmitt asked.

“...Well, I guess so...”

“Do you think we should try finding out the background information first?”

“...Maybe,” Elsia answered, sighing as she gazed through the lens.

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Meanwhile.

[illegible]

Lorie snuggled on and on, continuing her squirming embrace, or whatever you'd call it, and ignoring Kyouhei's objections.

"Hmm," frowned Pamil.

After frowning at the pair of them for a while, she trotted over...

“Onii-sama!” she cried, clinging on to the opposite side of Kyouhei.

“Wai... Pamil?!”

“I won’t lose!” she insisted, a strange sense of competitiveness blazing within her. “You’re my Onii-sama!”

“Well, yeah, I am, but...”

"So I won't let some girl calling you 'Onee-sama' have you!"

“That’s not the point—”

"Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama,
Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama!"

A face snuggled into his side.

[illegible]

A face snuggled into his other side.

“Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama,

Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama!"

"Onii-sama, Onii-sama, Onii-sama, Onii-sama, Onii-sama, Onii-sama, Onii-sama, Onii-sama, Onii-sama, Onii-sama, Onii-sama!"

"The hell is this mess?!" Kyouhei asked. "...Hey, the pair of you, listen!"

"Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama!"

"Onii-sama, Onii-sama, Onii-sama, Onii-sama, Onii-sama, Onii-sama, Onii-sama, Onii-sama, Onii-sama, Onii-sama, Onii-sama!"

And so on it went, for a seeming eternity.

"Let him go, Kyouhei is my onii-sama!" Pamil yelled.

"No, I finally met my onee-sama!" Lorie screamed.

"Let him go!"

"I shall not!"

"...You're both idiots!" Kyouhei groaned, his complaints falling on deaf ears.

"Let. Him. Go!"

"I. Shall. Not!"

The two had switched to pulling him towards themselves by his arms.

"Ow! Ow! My arms are coming off!"

"Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama, Onee-sama!"

"Onii-sama, Onii-sama, Onii-sama, Onii-sama, Onii-sama, Onii-sama, Onii-sama, Onii-sama, Onii-sama, Onii-sama, Onii-sama!"

"I'm gonna break! You're gonna kill me!"



“I’ve got it!” Mizuhito declared proudly, after having watched the situation for a while. “The one to release Kyouhei’s hand at his pained yells must be the real little sister!”

“Who are you, Solomon?!” Kyouhei had to demand, in tears, as there was no one else to make the quip for him.

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“Then, it is you?” Lorie checked.

“So it would appear,” Pamil agreed.

Several minutes after the Solomonian—or something like that—judgment, which happened just before Kyouhei had halved enough, the girls had finally calmed down.

They’d moved to Mizuhito’s jogging route: the artificial beach. The three had come to get the coffin that Lorie had been inside. They couldn’t leave such a fishy thing in plain sight; someone might connect it back to Pamil, and then to Shuuhei’s shady dealings.

Things had gotten annoying with Mizuhito, so Kyouhei had tempted him with possible fame if he went to Akiba in that getup, making him leap aboard a taxi in his goth-punk outfit. He was probably getting his picture taken in Akihabara as they spoke.

Back to the point.

“Then...” Lorie began, looking at Kyouhei regretfully, “you’re not my onee-sama...?”

“Obviously not.”

“You were so nice to snuggle into though...”

“That’s how you decide relationships?!” he exclaimed, holding in the full yell.

“It’s okay, Lorie,” Pamil said, putting her hand on Lorie’s shoulder as she slumped.

“Onee-sama...?”

“Kyouhei is indeed not your onee-sama. That is an unfortunate reality, and

won't change."

Kyouhei resisted his yell of "Unfortunate?!"

"But," she continued, flinging her other arm to point toward him, "there's no need to worry, it is a tenet of Japanese law that you can snuggle into an onii-sama as well!"

"Like hell it is!"

"Dear me!" As Lorie looked at Kyouhei, her eyes shone. There was clearly something wrong with their brains.

"But, Lorie, I'm your big sister, and I met Kyouhei first, so I get to snuggle first."

"That's okay, Onee-sama!" Lorie exclaimed.

"Ugh, forget it, do what you like..." he said, deciding to postpone the pointless conversation and prioritize retrieving the coffin.

Those thoughts in his mind, Kyouhei walked along the beach.

"Still..." he muttered, turning to watch the android sisters walk happily hand in hand, "I'm gonna end up looking after her too, aren't I?"

Well, that was to be expected with how Pamil was brought into the country as luggage, and how Lorie drifted ashore—neither of them was here exactly legally.

Just the thought of it made him want to die, but he couldn't just abandon them now...

"Kyouhei!"

"Onii-sama!"

The two of them gripped a hand each. He stiffened for a moment, thinking that they might be about to try and tear him in half again, but apparently they just wanted to hold hands.

"...Well... one person more, two people more... it's all the same," he concluded. He was feeling melancholic, but there was a certain excitement to getting more family. "At least I won't be bored."

Suddenly, he stopped the three of them.

“Kyouhei?”

“Onii-sama?”

They asked, seeing him stand there silently.

He remained quiet, staring forwards at *it*.

The ‘it’ in question was the water’s edge.

There was something within it drawing his attention. It was a large black box, big enough for a person to fit inside.

There was no mistaking it. While he couldn’t say for certain without seeing them next to each other, it was pretty much identical to the one Pamil had been inside. Indeed, there was a coffin there.

“...Why?”

...And nine others.

They were scattered down the beach, like a game of spot the odd one out.

“Oh, there’s a lot of them,” Pamil said in admiration.

“There’s too many!! Why are they all here?!”

Of course, however much of an idiot Mizuhito was, if there had been ten coffins there to start with, he would have mentioned it. So, when Mizuhito had been here this morning and met Lorie, the collection of coffins hadn’t been there.

Which meant...

“There are more now,” Lorie said, unconcerned. “Perhaps they divided.”

“They ain’t gonna multiply through mitosis!”

As he yelled, he had a realization.

They were spread across the beach, so they’d drifted ashore, that much was clear. Consequently, they had probably come from a capsized cargo ship, or they’d been thrown overboard.

Off-shore nets held no meaning unless they were thrown into the ocean.

Therefore...

Perhaps the coffin Shuuhei had found in the garbage dump after the destruction of the Bergmann Kingdom should have been removed from the country and ended up there by mistake...?

In that case, those coffins were—

“Oh, look, Kyouhei!” Pamil cried out happily, pointing at the coffins as all of them (except Lorie’s) began venting steam.

“Wai—No...!”

The coffins—naturally, of course—paid no attention to the complaints coming from Kyouhei’s mouth and clattered as they opened.

The phrase ‘driven into a corner’ went through Kyouhei’s mind for several reasons.

Then...

Nine figures staggered from the coffins.

For some reason, they all looked to Kyouhei.

“Honey!”

“Dear!”

“Uncle!”

“Auntie!”

“Father!”

“Mother!”

“Cousin!”

“Sister!”

“Brother!”

They all cried simultaneously.

Kyouhei was dumbfounded.

The nine of them fell silent too, having realized something was amiss.

Pamil and Lorie kept quiet too, having realized what was happening.

One thing broke the bizarre silence:

“Hey, Pamil...”

“Hmm?”

“...Am I... going to... have to look after them all...?” Kyouhei finally managed in a quavering voice.

Chapter 2 - Under a Certain Winter Sky

He took a sip of black tea from the cup. It was a cup of Earl Grey, according to his order.

There was no aroma, and it was tasteless in his mouth. However, it was probably a problem with his tasting rather than the tea itself. It was almost as if his tongue had been anesthetized.

Kyouhei put the cup back on the table while frowning.

“I’ll be in the back if you need me,” said the Corvette’s owner, Kaoruko Houwa, nonchalantly. She then put her words into action and vanished inside. As she left, she gave a final cheery reminder that he could come get her if he needed anything.

A wise move on her part.

In a sense, the Corvette was a familiar sight to Kyouhei. It had various accouterments to make it look like a mountain hut and a total of about 20 seats. The entire café was filled with a sense of foreboding that seemed to turn others away.

“Right... just making sure I’ve got everything right here,” Kyouhei began, glancing at the girl next to him as he did.

She was a beautiful girl, the kind you would find your gaze trailing unconsciously after if you passed next to her in the street. Her features struck a balance between refinement and adorableness. Her hair was as straight as an arrow and like spun gold. Her eyes were a fathomless blue, shining like sapphires. Her skin was off-white, like smooth porcelain. No matter the angle you looked upon her from, there were no faults in her appearance. She was almost like a work of art, too perfect to be a creature of flesh and blood. Describing her as fairy-like would not be amiss.

Pamil Terrill Karl Bergmann—that was the girl’s name.

For a number of reasons—seriously, a lot—she had been living in the Nanbu

household as Kyouhei's younger sister. Her personality belied her looks, though... Once she opened her mouth, you would know her for the eccentric that she was. A lunat—a girl who liked to claim that she was the body double android of a ruined country's princess.

But forget all that.

At the end of the day, her abnormality was nothing new.

Amongst other things, she'd fire beams from her eyes, emit fire as if she were a flamethrower, and was strong enough that she could probably tie a metal pipe into a bow. Regardless, whether he wanted to or not, Kyouhei was pretty used to all that by this point. Pamil seemed to have come to understand what he wanted and had stopped being quite so extreme, at least a little.

However...

"So you're all Pamil's..."

"Indeed."

Now the problem was across from her.

Or should we say *problems*.

Several of them.

"We are the thirtieth king of the Bergmann Kingdom, King Dolph Terrill Balor Bergmann... 's body double android, Dolph X, the father of this Pamil there," declared the man in front of him, in the opposite seat to be precise, with a bearing truly fit for the ruler of a country.

Nothing was missing.

Not his tone, not his aristocratic features, not even his solemn demeanor.

Still, everything clashed discordantly with his surroundings.

All would have been well if he'd been wearing silken clothes in an extravagant reception area. Instead, he was a middle-aged man claiming to be a king whilst wearing jeans and a T-shirt and sitting in a café that looked like a mountain hut, which completely ruined the impression. Whatever the actual situation was, all Kyouhei could see was a geezer caught up in delusions and claiming ownership

of an non-existent throne.

Although he was serious.

“...So... I see,” was, therefore, all Kyouhei could let out in response.

If it were just Dolph, that would be one thing, but there also were his compatriots lurking behind him.

“I am his queen, Caleriette...’s body double android, Caleriette IV. I’m Pamil’s mother.”

“I’m Princess Pamil’s little sister, Princess Lorie...’s body double android, Lorie III.”

“I’m the Queen’s younger sister.”

“Her husband.”

“Their son.”

“His cousin.”

“Her little brother.”

“His big sister.”

“Her little sister.”

Even if it wasn’t the whole clan, there were way too many people to just sum them up under the title of “the royal family.”

They all had different heights, sexes, hairstyles, and ages, but their ethereality was much the same as Pamil’s. Each of them seemed to make the air itself sparkle from their mere presence. If it hadn’t been for the profusion of delusions, even Kyouhei would smile at the sight.

“Um, and the people behind you, are they possibly...”

“Honestly,” came an exasperated voice from behind Dolph as the latter sighed. The bob-cutted owner of the voice, beyond her hairstyle and some lingering youth in her features, was the spitting image of Pamil. This was Lorie. Well, actually, according to her... “we have said it repeatedly: each and every one of us is a body double android.”

...she wasn't Lorie herself, but her body double android, Lorie III.

"Um..." Kyouhei managed, holding in his urge to rant as he thought.

Essentially, all of these people were tripping through the same kind of fantasy as Pamil.

All of them though...?

One or two people was one thing, but would it be realistic for all ten of them to be caught up in the same delusion?

Well, they do say madness is contagious...

Kyouhei had indeed felt his mind twisting around as he followed Pamil's conversation in the beginning.

Actually, maybe she is a fantasist because she grew up with this lot?

Things had started with Lorie drifting ashore in a coffin that was identical to Pamil's.

She was the spitting image of Pamil—loopiness, strength, and lack of common sense included. She had both Pamil's good and bad points, and had claimed she was Pamil's little sister's body double android. He'd had many thoughts about it and gone to collect her coffin only to find ten of them.

And thus, his swelling unease was borne out in full when the Bergmann Kingdom Royal Family...s body double androids (or so they claimed) appeared—a group of lunatics.

And, I know nobody asked, but they were all completely nude too.

Frankly speaking, he'd wanted to turn tail and leave, but he couldn't do that, so he'd rushed to a nearby supermarket and bought some clothes, handed them over, and then brought them to the Corvette so they could talk without undue attention.

As ever, regardless of it being a holiday, the café was open, but with no customers. This fact often made Kyouhei worry about the café's continued existence, but he was grateful for it today.

Anyway.

“Let’s get back on track,” said Pamil’s mother, Caleriette, with a calm voice.

She was a dainty woman, but she was a beauty. With certain features still visible through her clothes, she was very much a “grown-up Pamil.” She looked more like an actress or something, certainly not the mother of two children.

“I am unaware of exactly how we came to be separated...” she continued peacefully, her voice a refined version of Pamil’s, containing a mature charm that the latter lacked. The words spilling from her lips, however, were a whole heap of fantasy. “...but we are the royal family, and a family lives together. In fact, it would be unnatural if that were not the case. And as their body double androids, we do our utmost to avoid unnatural behavior.”

Coming from you?! Kyouhei thought instinctively, but obviously kept it silent.

Pamil alone was one thing, but a demonstration of eye-beams from a whole group of self-proclaimed royal body double androids, or the lightning that came out of their hands, would be impossible for Kyouhei to stop. He had to take great care not to provoke them.

“But... Mother...” Pamil objected with a confused expression, “I’m Kyouhei’s sister here.”

“That’s just an emergency measure, is it not?” Caleriette said. Her voice was still gentle, but hid a layer of iron beneath it, refusing to allow objections. “After all, which seems more natural, you as Kyouhei’s sister, or you as my daughter?”

Well, from appearances, there was certainly more in common between the two white women. Rather than Pamil acting as Kyouhei’s sister despite his yellower skin tone and their general facial differences, it made more sense for her to be Caleriette’s daughter—it just seemed more natural.

“But, legally, Kyouhei and I are—”

“We make our judgments on Bergmann laws; the laws of Japan have nothing to do with it. What was the word in Japanese again? Oh, yes, ex-tra-le-gal. Extra-legal.”

Well, to begin with, their relationship had been registered into the country’s records via Shuuhei’s extra-legal methods (to put it very delicately), so Kyouhei couldn’t really take a stand on the legal front.

“I know!” interjected Lorie, her eyes sparkling with sudden inspiration.
“Everything will be fine if we adopt Kyouhei-oniisama?”

“It won’t,” Kyouhei answered.

“Eh? Why?”

“Because.”

“I thought it was a good idea...” she pouted unhappily.

Obviously, though, Kyouhei didn’t at all want to be part of a family in which all its members lived under the pretense of being body double androids for royalty.

...But is it really a fantasy? he suddenly thought to himself.

Pamil had powers far beyond what you’d call normal; that much was indisputable. Moreover, these people claiming to be body doubles of the Bergmann royal family had all come out of the same kind of coffin-cases as her.

Kyouhei couldn’t think of any explanation that was any better than “Maybe they really are body double androids for royalty.”

“Regardless... things cannot continue as they are, no?” Caleriette asked.

Despite her persistent gentleness and grace... Kyouhei could feel a slight undercurrent of anger in her voice.

Pamil grumbled and frowned.

Isn’t she happy to meet her family? Kyouhei thought to himself.

She’d been ill at ease the entire time she’d been with her parents and sister.

I’d get it if she didn’t get on with her dad or something, but it’s all of them.

Their claims alone made them a good match, though.

“What are your thoughts on this, Kyouhei-san?”

“Ah, well... I couldn’t... really comment,” Kyouhei managed, surprised at his opinion being sought. *Pamil should be choosing her own path.*

A heavy silence filled the air.

Suddenly, Dolph broke the silence with a nod and a noise of consideration,

having remained wordless since introducing himself.

“It would seem we have a difference of opinion. Therefore, as king, and as father, I have a suggestion.”

The Bergmann family all waited quietly at the head of the family’s declaration. Even Kyouhei felt himself stiffen at the solemn proclamation.

The king looked across them all before rendering his judgment gravely: “Let’s go for a walk.”

Kyouhei couldn’t help but go limp.

“...The hell did that come from?!” he demanded, forgetting who he was talking to and interjecting just as he would with Pamil.

Dolph, though, showed no displeasure at it and answered easily: “Well, we’re together as a family now.”

“That’s not...”

“Don’t you think it’s nice to go out and enjoy the air when you hit the limits of a conversation?”

Well, he wasn’t wrong.

Looking around, he realized that he was the only one who had taken issue with it; the other Bergmanns all just nodded in understanding.

A delusional family indeed; none of them had a chain of reasoning.

“Just do what you want...” Kyouhei said, slightly uneasily.

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“Look, Mother, there’s a kitten!” Lorie cried happily, scampering after the cat.

Caleriette followed at a measured pace. Even though she was just walking in a straight line, it was almost like she was dancing.

The day was a cold midwinter’s one, but with the sun high in the sky, the streets were slightly warmer thanks to soaking in the sunlight.

They’d headed to the shopping district after leaving the café. Not out of any goal or inclination to; that just happened to be the direction they’d taken.

They do look just like normal people right now... Kyouhei thought as he watched the ten self-proclaimed androids—including Pamil—wandering around.

The group held a metaphorical banner declaring them foreigners with their uncommon good looks, but ‘rare’ was still in the range of ‘normal’ for people. For someone like Kyouhei, who had traveled the world since he was young, that was even more the case.

“Kitty! Meow! Ahaha!”

Lorie had spotted the kitten sunning itself at the roadside and chased after it. The kitten bolted in surprise, hiding under a four-seater that was parked at the curbside.

“Aww, it ran away,” she lamented unhappily.

She still hadn’t given up, though, and laid down, stretching her hand under the car with an “Ngh...!”

It wasn’t something befitting royalty, but it was nice to see her as a young girl who wanted to fuss over a cat for a bit.

“I can’t reeeeach,” she complained.

“Oh my,” her mother chuckled, sounding like a chiming bell, from next to her. She looked just like any other mother supervising her child.

But...

“Listen, Lorie,” she continued, “royalty must not give up so easily.”

“Yes, Mother.”

“Once you know what you can and cannot do, your path will become clear,” Caleriette said with a smile. “If you cannot reach something, you must make it so you can.”

So saying, she leaned forwards and hooked her slender fingers under the car.

“Wai—” Kyouhei exclaimed, trying to stop her.

Then, in a way that would have gone with a *fwip* sound effect in manga, she lifted the car as if it was made out of paper.

To clarify, it was an ordinary car. It wasn't a bike trailer, or just a bike even. It looked to be at least a ton. Yet Caleriette was holding that massive weight in the air, even if its rear wheels were still on the road, with her dainty arm.

"Wh-What are you doing, Caleriette-san?!" Kyouhei protested, wary of onlookers as he tried to get her to stop.

"What am I doing...?" she asked, still holding the car aloft with a single slender arm. She tilted her head, her expression saying: "It was in the way, so I simply removed it, what of it?"

Next to her, Lorie had succeeded in embracing the cat and was enjoying herself.

The cat in question, incidentally, had its fur on end in shock and fear. Regardless of its youth, it knew just how strange what it was seeing was. Lorie paid that no mind, though, and tightened her grip on the writhing cat.

"Look, Mother! It's so fluffy!"

Kyouhei momentarily feared that the cat was about to be crushed like it was under a press, but it didn't happen.

Still...



Caleriette dropped the car, sending it crashing back to the ground. However, there was still an imprint of her hand on its bumper.

“...Crap,” Kyouhei groaned.

It would have been awful if someone had seen them; it would definitely have been reported.

At a loss, Kyouhei turned to Pamil for help, thinking that she at least would have more common sense. “Pamil! Do something about that, would you?!”

“I will. Leave it to me,” she said with a trustworthy nod before walking briskly towards them.

“Mother, Lorie,” she addressed them, “a word please.”

“What would that be?”

“What is it?”

The two of them asked in turn, blinking at her.

“You must always wash your hands after playing with animals,” she told them gravely.

“Ah!” Both mother and child nodded as if they’d forgotten.

“That’s not what I meant!!” Kyouhei yelled.

Dolph gave a satisfied nod from where he was standing next to Kyouhei, watching them warmly. “Behold, Kyouhei-kun. This is the warmth of a family. A pet certainly does grease the wheels of conversation.”

“...You don’t have any other comment?”

“Hmm?” Dolph questioned.

Yes, they were Pamil’s family. Missing common sense like that was just like Pamil had been when they’d first met—and now too, on occasion. He honestly had no idea how they’d survived up until now with their utter lack of normalcy and such.

Nope... I can’t let them go around town like this; it’ll be chaos.

It would be about ten times more than Pamil (the nearest competing

product).

“Dolph-san,” Kyouhei said, “let’s not go to the town.”

Dolph turned to look at Kyouhei with a serious expression on his face. “Why?” he asked, his eyebrows furrowing.

“Because...” Kyouhei began, containing his urge to say that he didn’t want to lead around a troupe of crazies through the city, and keeping as even a tone as he could, “there’s a better place for a family to go on a day off.”

Honestly, to go to that place in question was an idea born from desperation, but Dolph seemed to be interested, as he nodded several times. “Oh...? Is it a place that would be more family-ish than window-shopping around town with my daughter and wife, with the former crying out: ‘Papa, buy thaaat’?”

He still spoke with all the majesty befitting a ruler as he drew closer to Kyouhei. The things he was saying, though, sounded more like some crappy joke.

“Indeed, I’m sure it’ll get family lines like: ‘Papa, give me a piggyback♪’ and... maybe some sweet words like: ‘Dear, don’t you think we should try for another child~?’ I’m sure of it...!”

Kyouhei’s idea was his only hope. He was so desperate that even he had no idea what he was actually saying... but he had to bear with it.

For the peace of the shopping district.

And his own tranquility.

“...Oh hoh. Then, let’s hear it. What is the name of this paradise?” Dolph exclaimed, a sharp glint in his eyes.

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Her azure eyes stared at him, watery.

“Onii-sama...”

Kyouhei faltered in the face of Lorie’s pleading gaze.

She was clinging to his waist, holding her still-undeveloped body to his.

“Please... I... I want to!”

Due to her short stature, she came up to about his waist, so the position of her face against his body would... make it seem like there was a crime being committed if someone saw them.

“I said no, and no means no; you’re still too small,” he managed, stiffening with the strain. Ah, I mean his voice, of course, just in case.

“Kyouhei, I’m asking you too. Please grant her wish?” Pamil muttered... quietly embracing him as well.

“...Wai... Pamil?!” Kyouhei stuttered, sandwiched between the sisters.

It hadn’t bothered him until now, but he could feel the soft sensations—sensations that seemed unlikely from an android—through their clothes, and could smell their sweet feminine scent. And, you know, Kyouhei was a healthy seventeen-year-old boy...

“Would you... Kyouhei?”

“Please... Onii-sama.”

Lorie was at his front, and Pamil was at his back. He could feel the threat that neither would let go until he gave the okay.

Therefore, Kyouhei sighed in exaggeration.

“Fine, do what you like!”

They were in the Midorikawa Zoo, a small attraction in the corner of a large park about 12 kilometers from the city.

There were fewer animals exhibited than in the average zoo. Even so, there were animals you’d never see in day-to-day life in a city, and it was well situated too. There was an offer for families, so the tired workers of the area could bring their families for an evening—it was perfect.

There was an area in the pamphlet’s map labeled “Petting Plaza.” It was an area of bare ground about 100 meters in diameter, divided into three areas separated with wooden fencing. In that area, you could stroke rabbits and goats as they went around grazing on the grass.

Even more popular was the third area, where you could ride a horse for 500 yen a time.

“Just once,” he insisted, pulling out a coin from his wallet and placing it in Lorie’s small palm.

“Father, Onii-sama said I could!” she cried happily after receiving the coin. She then raced over to the horses.

“My apologies for all of this, boy,” he nodded, apologizing excessively seriously again.

“Man... who ever heard of a penniless royal family...” Kyouhei muttered irritatedly.

Having come out of their coffins stark naked, the Bergmann family was literally penniless indeed. Therefore, it had been Kyouhei who had fronted the cost for the trip and entry fees.

Incidentally, if you were wondering where the rest of the family was, they were safely in the other corners—where you could enter for free—with the rabbits and goats, all of them enjoying themselves.

As Kyouhei had surmised, the screws in their heads weren’t loose enough to use their Royal Powers on the animals, and he was sure that it was at the very least a better option than the city would have been.

“I guess I’ll just claim the costs back from Dad later...” Kyouhei muttered, considering his funds for the rest of the month. Entertaining Dolph and the others had nothing to do with Shuuhei, but since it was related to Pamil, he didn’t think he wouldn’t take responsibility. “...Well, whatever.”

Looking towards where Lorie was buying her ticket, he could see her happiness emanating from the depths of her heart. She might be a little... off, but seeing a girl like that seemed well worth the 500 yen.

Pamil came around from behind him to stand next to him, looking at the sight with bright eyes and a smile on her face.

“Everything we see and touch... is all a new experience, so each sensation like this is precious. Particularly for Lorie; I heard from Father that she’s set up as a young girl, so she isn’t programmed with the skills of an equestrian, and that’s why she wanted to try it so much.”

Kyouhei was lost for words and gazed deeply at Pamil's face.

"Hm, Kyouhei, do you find a problem with my facial expression?"

"Nah... your problems are all with your persona—I mean, I just thought you looked like a real big sister."

"Hmm?" Pamil frowned in thought at the unexpected statement. "Hmm... I didn't expect that. To think that contact with sister machines would cause partial changes."

"That's not what I mean!" Kyouhei cried, thinking: *Well, I guess it's fairly peaceful?* as he did.

However, as always, he remembered that not everything goes according to plan immediately afterward.

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The peace... was shattered by the neigh of a horse piercing his eardrums.

The fun mood within the park transitioned instantly to one of confusion. Kyouhei looked around frantically, and saw a horse rearing up on its hind legs, as well as Lorie holding on to its back for dear life. "Onee-sama!" she bawled, as she pulled on the reins.

At that, the horse got even more excited, its eyes bulging as it began to froth at the mouth and kick its forelegs. Even a horse of average height was easily taller than a human on its hind legs, and easily heavy enough to trample a small child.

"What happened?!" The royal couple came rushing over, their expressions changing.

Kyouhei heard a nearby child speaking to their parents nearby: "I saw it. That girl took the reins from the guide!"

He looked and saw an attendant slumped against the fence, twitching. Lorie had probably used her Royal Thunder or something.

While he didn't know the specifics... the girl had probably had a fit of childish selfishness and demanded to be allowed to ride on her own. The attendant hadn't let her, and then... or something like that.

“What on...”

Horses were sensitive animals, and could easily spook from sudden changes. If its handler collapsed in front of it, then...

“Jump down, Lorie!” Kyouhei cried.

Another attendant had rushed over and was trying to calm the horse by yelling “Whoa!”

The horse, though, swiveled madly before bolting off like an arrow.

“Kyaaaaaahhhhhh!”

Lorie and the horse vanished into the distance with a scream.

“Kyouhei!” Pamil called for help, her expression panicked.

At her eyes asking—actually, it was more like pleading—for help, Kyouhei quickly surveyed the area.

His gaze came to rest upon another corner of the Petting Plaza. There was a sign above it reading “Cycling Corner.”

“There!” he shouted, seeing the bikes lined up with a note saying that they could be borrowed freely.

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The horse was galloping along the fence, taking a large, circular path. Its huge body was going flat out, racing away like a bouncy ball with astounding acceleration.

Of course, no one there was marveling at the majesty of the animal, as should be the case, considering there was a little girl clinging to it.

The Petting Plaza was in an uproar, screams and angry yells flying about the place.

Amid all that... Kyouhei was keenly feeling the absurd power contained in Pamil’s frame as they sped off just as fast as the horse.

Pamil was pedaling the borrowed bike, so she was on the saddle, while Kyouhei was sitting on the luggage rack over the back wheel.

It was fast, okay? *Fast*.

Pamil was spinning the pedals with a strength that belied her slight frame, accelerating the bike, which was burdened by two people, as if it were weightless. The scenery seemed to blur past them, and Kyouhei felt like the wind resistance was going to blow him off the rack.

Impossible as it may normally seem, the bike was steadily gaining on the runaway horse.

Kyouhei's arms were wrapped tightly around Pamil's waist—narrower than he'd expected. He could easily wrap his arms around it so he didn't fall off.

"Lorie!" Kyouhei yelled once the bike pulled alongside the horse, leaving the riding all to Pamil. "What are you doing?! Jump off!"

He thought that, if she had super-strength and could fire lightning and eye beams, falling from a horse should be nothing to her.

"No, if I jump down, the horse might hit something!" Lorie cried, turning her face from where it was buried in the horse's mane. The look in her eyes wasn't one of fear; it was a look of confusion from not knowing what to do.



Lorie was right.

On his trips through the world because of his father's job, Kyouhei had traveled on horseback. Those experiences had taught him that a spooked horse that had shaken off its rider could sometimes run into obstacles and break some bones—for example, the people and fencing around here.

"Lorie won't let herself just abandon the horse and save herself," Pamil told him.

"...Right."

If she was so kind, he really wished she hadn't shocked the attendant in the first place, but it was a bit late now.

"Kyouhei, what do we do?" Pamil's voice sounded in his ear over the rushing wind and hoofbeats.

"Don't hold so tightly with your legs, and pull back on the reins with both hands!" Kyouhei yelled. The only option was the direct method. Using all his memories and rough knowledge, he told Lorie how to control the horse.

"Listen, don't you dare tighten your legs on the horse; pull back on the reins as you go backward. Gently! If you use your full strength, you'll spook it more and have it rear up!"

The order to stop a horse was to pull back evenly on both sides of the reins, but if you added a slight pressure with your right leg, that made it a command to gallop, which was the fastest gait a horse had.

Lorie had probably made that mistake.

"I'll fall back while I'm pulling on the reins!"

"You will! But don't you dare use your legs, okay?! Got it? Alright?!" he emphasized to Lorie as she seemed to regain her calm.

She did exactly what he'd told her, pulling the reins taut like they were a bowstring, her body falling back.

Then...

After a surprisingly short time, the horse slowed in accordance with her

command and finally came quietly to a stop.



Lorie had an uncomfortable expression on her face.

Caleriette had a demonic expression on her own.

There was a heavy feeling between the two of them, and no one spoke.

Apparently, they at least had enough awareness to realize that the earlier display was not good.

The evening sky was a vivid orange, and the gentle wind had none of the warmth of the afternoon. Instead, the area was filled with the chill of a day at its end.

They were just outside the zoo, having smoothed things over.

“Do you understand?” asked Caleriette heavily. “Your thoughtless actions caused many people a great deal of distress.”

“...I apologize deeply, Mother,” Lorie said, her head dropping.

Regardless of her despondent posture, the sharp line across Caleriette’s brow—showing her anger—didn’t fade. It really felt as if Lorie was about to get a spanking.

However...

Caleriette didn’t say anything more, and instead knelt and gathered Lorie into her arms, hugging her to her chest. It was a far more eloquent way of telling her she was forgiven, and made clear just how much Caleriette worried about her.

Is that... what a mother is? Kyouhei thought vaguely to himself as he watched mother embrace daughter.

He had no memories of being hugged like that. Not only that, but he also didn’t even know who his mother was.

It really is great for a family to be together, he thought earnestly.

And obviously, a real family would be better than the fake family that Pamil had with Kyouhei.

But...

That would mean that she would leave.

“Kyouhei?” Pamil spoke to him, looking curiously up at him, having noticed his expression clouding.

“It’s nothing,” he said, forcing a smile.

He didn’t know what was going through her mind as she looked at him, but she reached out a hand and gripped his sleeve tightly.

“...What’s up?” he asked.

“I... uh,” she mumbled, being oddly reticent about meeting his gaze, “just... felt like it.”

Kyouhei gave her a faint smile.

Then...

“Kyouhei-kun,” Dolph called him suddenly. The self-proclaimed king’s body double was once more excessively grave, “we’ve caused you many issues today. Actually, no, when taking Pamil into account, it is not just today; my apologies.”

“Ah... it’s fine.”

That was effectively a “Thanks for everything,” and would link to “But we cannot do so any longer.” And then, finally, to “We shall look after Pamil from now on.”

It was the end of their playing house.

The end of their fake family.

...

“Though it will cause you trouble,” Dolph continued, “please continue to take care of Pamil.”

“Huh?”

Kyouhei’s eyes widened. This was the exact opposite of what he’d expected.

Dolph continued regardless, though: “We spoke after the chaos. The kingdom has collapsed, and we, who were made as doubles for the royal family, have

lost our place. We have no titles and are in a country where we do not know right from left. However, this is in itself an opportunity, we believe.”

“An... opportunity?”

“As royalty, in our palace, each of us is limited in the amount of time we can spend together due to our positions. Now, however, we have no duties or responsibilities. We can all be together as a normal family.” Kyouhei stared silently at him. “It’s strange, isn’t it? We claim to be androids, fakes, but we see value in playing at being a family.”

“No...” Kyouhei shook his head.

That wasn’t the case, not at all.

“And so, we decided to go out in search of a place to be a family.”

Kyouhei let out a sigh of understanding.

“However, we decided... not to take Pamil with us on that journey.”

“...Why?”

“Do you really need to ask?” Dolph spoke, a faint smile on his face, troubled, almost resigned, but not unhappy in the slightest. “When I watched the two of you, I realized that it was for the best. When Lorie was in trouble, who did Pamil first turn to for help?”

“Father...” Pamil murmured, a dazed expression on her face.

“You are now this boy’s sister, Harumi Nanbu. You should stay with him... I won’t say goodbye—it’s too painful.”

Suddenly, Kyouhei realized why the Bergmann family hadn’t moved to help. Their Royal Powers would have easily been able to stop the horse. But, in the emergency, Pamil hadn’t immediately gone to her mother or father to help Lorie; she had gone to Kyouhei.

And so the family had realized it as well.

What held more meaning to her.

Between her position as a princess of Bergmann, and that of Kyouhei Nanbu’s sister.

“Father...”

“Farewell,” he said, before turning on his heel and leaving. The others, with various glances back at Pamil and Kyouhei, or bows, followed after him.

“...Are you okay with that?” Kyouhei asked.

“With what?” Pamil asked back, oddly surprised at his question.

“You know... not going with them.”

“What are you talking about, Kyouhei—actually, Onii-chan?” she answered. “I’m Kyouhei Nanbu’s sister; I should be with you.”

“...That’s a strange way to move out from your parents’,” Kyouhei joked with a slight smile.

“Hmm?” Pamil asked, looking at him for an explanation.

“It’s nothing. Let’s go home.”

“Let’s!” she agreed, smiling and nodding.

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Well then. This had all been well and good.

As the sun sank behind them, its last vestiges of light washing over them, Kyouhei and Pamil left the shopping district and entered the warehouse district by the port.

They were headed for the Nanbu house, which stood in that area.

Kyouhei input the security key for the service entrance and opened the door.

“I’m back,” Kyouhei muttered to no one.

“You’re late,” came a voice immediately.

Kyouhei started at the unexpected answer and looked around, only to see Dolph, who they should have parted with earlier.

“Wha...?!”

There was a space in one of the warehouse’s corners that was furnished with a table and chairs, which functioned as their living room. And in that space, sitting and drinking a cup of Japanese tea... was the Bergmann family.

“What are you doing here? Weren’t you going on a trip?!”

“Indeed, but there was an issue,” Dolph explained, his usual majesty dripping from every word. “We forgot something.”

“What?”

“That we have no money.”

Right, they didn’t. Kyouhei had been caught up in the situation and had forgotten.

“We may be royalty, we may be androids, but people who don’t work, don’t eat. So we all had a discussion and decided to go job-hunting in the city.”

“...Why are they so familiar with sayings when they don’t have any actual common sense themselves?” Kyouhei muttered to himself.

“Therefore, we first searched for a calm place to live. We decided to all rent an apartment... but the places in this country are all too small,” he proclaimed, solemnly of course, whether he heard Kyouhei’s mutterings or not.

Kyouhei had a feeling of dread.

Then...

“On our way back, at a loss, we came across your father, Kyouhei-kun: Shuuhei.”

“Ah.”

“He said: ‘Then, live with us. Thankfully, the next-door warehouse is free.’” Kyouhei seriously considered teaching his irresponsible father a lesson with his fists for saying something like that so carelessly. “So we shall be neighbors from tomorrow on, and decided to wait to give our greetings.”

Next to him were Lorie and Caleriette with a portable stove, cooking pasta. They had probably misunderstood the custom of giving soba noodles to your neighbor to state their intentions to get along, and were trying to do something similar.

“Pamil,” Kyouhei spoke.

“Hmm?”

“Why don’t you say something to your oh-so-wonderful family,” he spat, unable to get his feelings out himself. What was the point of that dramatic, tragic parting?

“Ah, right,” she said with a magnanimous nod. “Mother, Lorie.” The woman and little girl looked over at her. “When cooking pasta, it’s best to boil it in plenty of water,” she taught them.

“Not that!!” Kyouhei groaned.

Well, whatever. This was how Kyouhei became neighbors with his odd little sister’s even odder family.

And they all lived happily ever after.

...Probably.

Chapter 3 - For I Have Always Been By Your Side (I)

It was a completely ordinary statement.

“...I love you!”

It was a phrase that had been repeated more times than there were stars in the sky over the decades, the centuries, the millennia; the myriad of years. As a phrase, it was a line that most likely existed in all countries, regardless of race or creed.

“...Please go out with me!”

It was said on rainy streets.

Behind schools.

Under trees.

On street corners at night.

And even... in front of a café.

And yet, it was always sudden, and sent people into turmoil. Even if you expected it, or had some inkling it was coming, once those words were spoken in reality, the shock would assail all adolescents.

Kyouhei Nanbu was no exception.

He was a seventeen-year-old who sought ordinary normalcy. However, this time he didn't need to be self-conscious about it. The impact that those words had as they stabbed into his mind naturally threw him for a loop—as it'd normally happen. He froze, in a completely ordinary, normal way.

“Kyouhei?” asked a blonde-haired, blue-eyed girl curiously from next to him.

Her features were without flaw, and she looked almost like she was straight out of a fairy tale. She had snow-white skin, and eyes that sparkled like sapphires. Her golden hair seemed even smoother than silk. When she was standing there doing nothing on the street corner, her presence was out of this

world, making it seem like someone was filming a take for a movie; otherworldliness just overflowed from her.

Pamil Terrill Karl Bergmann.

She had become Kyouhei's sister due to certain circumstances. Of course, as you would surmise from their appearances, they weren't at all related by blood.

Then...

"Um..." spoke another girl, standing opposite her, looking shyly up at Kyouhei.

She was adorable as well. She had her hair perfectly cut in a bob, and round glasses like the bottom of milk bottles. She had no affectations, and you could call her plain, but she exuded cuteness just as much. She probably just had a natural beauty to begin with. She had curvy cheeks and a straight chin. Her eyes were reserved and slightly downcast, bordered by soft eyelashes. It all came together to give her the look of a Japanese beauty.

Well, normally her gloomy hobbies made her oddness stand out more than her looks, but that wasn't the case now. Her head was bowed, and she was trying to make herself appear smaller out of worry. Absolutely none of it made her look dreary at all... In fact, it made her look like an innocent girl inexperienced in love.

Her name was Sanae Murata.

She was a year behind Kyouhei, and was Pamil's classmate.

However...

"S-Senpai," she murmured.

"Ah..." He couldn't speak.

Sanae looked at how he was acting and turned away, with her eyes watering. "I'm sorry!" she apologized, though he didn't know what for.

The turmoil was still churning through Kyouhei, so he hadn't understood properly, but he immediately reached out and grabbed her hand.

The tension was so thick you could cut it with a knife.

Their gazes met.

“So,” came a voice from their side, its owner watching them both stand like statues, “go out to where?”

Her initial address had reminded the other two that she was there, and they immediately tensed up. Regardless of their reaction, though, Pamil was deadly serious as she asked her question.

“You mean... seriously? You know, um...” Kyouhei tried to get out.

“If she’s talking about the station, then get some ground beef on the way back,” Pamil said easily.

Kyouhei and Sanae exchanged glances at her scarily normal demand.

“Um, Pamil-san,” Kyouhei said, slipping into a politer form of address due to the shock, “do you know what she means by that?”

“Hmm?” Pamil wondered, cocking her head. “Is there something odd about it?”

“...Ah, well, no. Not... really.”

“I’ll stay here for a while. If it looks like it’ll take you a while, phone the Corvette, or home, and let me know.”

So saying, Pamil turned on her heels and re-entered the café, which they’d only just left.

The other two looked blankly at the door for several minutes.

“Umm, uh,” Kyouhei spoke.

The two of them went scarlet and looked away from each other.

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For Kyouhei, Sanae’s confession was completely unprompted, an utter surprise, or a bolt from the blue.

Meanwhile, from Sanae’s perspective, it was of course a completely reasoned, not-at-all-sudden occurrence.

Sanae had been interested in Kyouhei for some time. There were many reasons why, but she’d fallen for him before Pamil showed up, and had stalked—or rather, had kept him under heavy observation since then.

Therefore, her confession would have inevitably become reality if something were to spur her from her cowardice.

Something small would have done it.

A single word.

A single act.

The first domino falling.

Your everyday life could easily fall apart from something like that...

“Her parents appeared?” asked one of Sanae’s few friends, Youko Minebe, in shock.

Her hair was in a ponytail, and she looked like an active girl. She would look right at home in a tank top, with a basketball under her arm. She was the exact opposite of Sanae, so much so you would wonder how they became friends.

Well, moving on.

“Are you sure?” She looked for confirmation from Sanae.

“Yeah... I didn’t get what was going on, but they looked similar... and she called them mother and father,” Sanae answered.

Youko hummed.

School had ended for the day, and they were in the classroom. The red sunlight filled the room. The relaxed atmosphere was almost deserted of students, the only two being Sanae and Youko.

“This is bad,” Youko concluded. “Her real parents showed up, and they even asked him to take care of her, right? That’s basically giving their blessing.”

Sanae’s expression stiffened. She’d seen it happen herself, but hearing it from Youko made her feel it even more clearly, regardless of the fact that she’d already realized that.

This had all happened on the prior Saturday.

As ever, Sanae had Kyouhei under heavy observation, and had seen everything; the ten foreigners that appeared with Kyouhei, and their outing to the zoo.

And... you know, whatever may have happened there.

What her parents said to Kyouhei.

And...

“But...”

She’d watched them in the darkening streets.

She’d seen Kyouhei and Pamil walking hand in hand.

“But...”

She didn’t want to believe it.

She tried thinking of all kinds of excuses, but hadn’t been able to come up with anything, so she’d waited for Pamil to leave before her and talked to Youko.

However...

“No buts—what other explanation is there?”

“Well... well,” Sanae spoke, curling in on herself like a scared rabbit, “maybe Nanbu-senpai exceeded the bounds of siblinghood and then was alone in the house with Pamil-chan... Then, everything went quiet, but, but, with more eloquence... Or perhaps, in the quietness, the surging feelings between a man and woman floated up like magma, then Senpai’s kind hands stripped her clothing and then finally... Ahhhh!”

“Calm down already.”

Sanae was writhing, as ever when it came to this issue—or actually, more so than usual—and so Youko slapped her across the back of the head.

“But... but, Youko-chan!”

“You’re just...” she glared somewhat for a moment at Sanae as her eyes teared up, before finally letting out a long sigh. “Every time you do this. Every time. You start going on with R-18 fantasies about the two of them.”

“...Y-Youko-chan?” Sanae blinked, realizing that something was different with her friend.

“This time I’m speaking my mind.”

“Uh... Uhm...”

“Do you think up these potential—but actually impossible—situations because you don’t want to hurt yourself? You must actually know that those two don’t say or do that kind of stuff,” Youko pressed Sanae as the latter trembled.

“...I...” Sanae said, hesitating as Youko cut to the heart of the matter.

“You come up with those delusions, then use those galge situations to cheer yourself up, telling yourself that ‘there’s no way that would happen in real life,’ don’t you?” Youko continued mercilessly.

Sanae had no words. Then, after a brief silence: “Youko-chan, you play galge?”

“That’s not the point!” Youko yelled, slapping the desk. “Anyway, rather than fantasies that are running away from reality... think realistically for once. If not, you’ll miss your chance to show your ‘love.’”

Sanae couldn’t even groan at the deluge of harsh words. She knew that none of it was said to hurt her; each one of them was to help. Youko was telling her that no matter how much she kept deceiving herself with these unrealistic fantasies, it wouldn’t change the situation, at least not in the way she wanted. If she couldn’t act in reality, she’d get nothing.

“Sanae, are you going to be happy just watching Senpai from the shadows?”

“...But... I...”

“I’m not telling you to just confess right now. Start with something small, like going somewhere together.”

For example, even if it was a staple, she could get two film tickets and invite Kyouhei. Or she could suggest discussing something with him, just the two of them. That would start making her more of a fixture in his mind, slowly but surely.

If she could do that, though, none of this would have been a concern. Sanae slumped in depression.

“Friends and boyfriends are different, you know?” Youko said in a less forceful voice, possibly unhappy at having to constantly lecture her.

Sanae was silent.

Yes, friends and lovers *were* different.

You could have many seats for ‘friends,’ but ‘lovers,’ at least with the sense of values Sanae had been brought up with, you could only have one. So, if you wanted that seat, you had to sit in it while it was still empty, or else dethrone someone else.

“Think about it,” Youko said, picking up her bag and standing up. “I’ve got stuff to do today, so I’m heading home.”

“Ah... Yeah, thanks,” Sanae answered, pasting a smile on her face.

Youko walked off, stopping at the classroom’s door. “Sanae.”

“Yeah?”

“Good luck.”

Sanae looked for something fitting to say, something to express her feelings, but all she could say was “Thanks.”

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And that’s what caused it.

Sanae had taken a step, spurred on by Youko’s push at her back. Though what exactly she would do wasn’t something Sanae—who had gotten into romance uncommonly late and was still quite innocent—knew.

“...A realistic... fantasy...” she mumbled to herself as she trudged along her route home.

Of course, it wasn’t unimaginable. She didn’t watch Kyouhei just for the sake of it; she more or less knew if he was likely to do something or not. She prided herself on knowing best what kind of person he was.

“Senpai... wouldn’t rush into things so quickly... just because they live together... He wouldn’t,” she told herself quietly.

Kyouhei and Pamil had a complex relationship.

She tried imagining herself as part of it.

“Senpai is so kind, so he...”

Sanae had only had eyes for Kyouhei ever since he’d picked her bag up for her. It was such a little thing, but usually the norm would have been to pretend you didn’t see, so that small kindness, done just as a matter of course, stuck with her.

So, that day, he would...

It’s such a cold day, so he’d suggest going and warming up with a nice cup of tea...

It was easy to imagine. He had a café that he liked, and one that she had visited several times.

They’d be inside the Corvette.

They’d sit next to each other. Rather than purposefully putting a table between them, he’d prefer to sit next to her so they could feel each other’s warmth and presence. Then, she’d order a slightly sweet milk tea. They’d sit quietly and spend the time together, exchanging needless chatter and loving words.

But...

“...I...”

The one sitting next to him wasn’t Sanae.

It was Pamil.

She tried to take the imagined seat Pamil was sitting in, but couldn’t; she couldn’t imagine room for her in their relationship.

Suddenly, she felt a chill down her back. If Sanae saw things like that, surely Kyouhei would do so all the more? As things were, surely Sanae wouldn’t even register to him as anything more than one of many in the year beneath him.

“...No!”



She could suddenly feel the ground crumbling beneath her feet as a sense of loneliness made her expression freeze.

She'd probably followed the route half unconsciously, because before she realized it, she was in front of the Corvette.

Then, the door opened, the bell above it ringing. It was just like she was dreaming, like she was seeing the scene she'd imagined earlier. It didn't feel real. The timing was far too significant to call it a mere coincidence.

"Huh... Murata-san?" Kyouhei asked, standing beside the doorway.

It wasn't just him.

"Hm? Fancy seeing you here, Sanae." The girl looking out from behind him was, of course, Pamil. "Did you come for a cup of tea too?" she asked.

Like it was obvious; as if there were no other possibilities. The two of them were together, as if it were only natural they would be.

Sanae's lips parted and a breath padded through them.

She'd just happened to meet him there, they'd exchange greetings, and part. No one, or at least not Kyouhei, would find it odd.

That was as it should be.

If they were just schoolmates—

I don't want that! she thought. She wanted a reason, just a small reason to be by his side. She wanted to be welcomed in his mind.

Those feelings had been held prisoner in her heart for so long, and now they were growing explosively. It might have been her coincidental conversation with Youko that had caused it, but for her, it must have been fate.

And so, she spoke more naturally than she was expecting: "Nanbu-senpai!" she exclaimed, starting to say something she'd dreamed of over and over. "...I love you! ...Please go out with me!"

It must have been an utter shock. The only thing that left Kyouhei's mouth wasn't even a word, just a half-witted noise.

And thus, we return to the present.

Kyouhei and Sanae walked together, mostly through inertia. They didn't even know where they were going.

When Kyouhei came back to his senses, he was walking back home, and at his side was Sanae, rather than the normal Pamil.

The thought: *Do I just not feel right...?* passed through his mind. Did he just not feel right without Pamil at his side?

He asked himself that, but didn't know the answer.

"Um... Senpai?" Sanae spoke uneasily, as if she'd felt Kyouhei's thoughts.

Suddenly, he realized that they'd not spoken since they'd left the Corvette.

Obviously, she would be uneasy.

"A-Ahh... it's nothing. Nothing at all," he temporized, telling himself more than her. After that, though, silence once again fell between them.

He could feel a precarious balance; if he said something carelessly, it could destroy the mood between them. Perhaps because of his nerves, his heart was racing, like an engine with more fuel than it needed.

I'm stuck...

He didn't know what to do, and let out the second—hidden—sigh of the day.

While he wasn't proud of it, this was the first time in his life that Kyouhei had been confessed to by a girl; he couldn't not be gutted by it.

Actually, he thought, suddenly remembering an old memory.

There was some castle, and he'd met a blonde-haired, blue-eyed girl.

He was sure the young girl had said something to him...

"Ich liebe sie."

He couldn't remember her face, or even her voice; only that simple statement was still stuck, miraculously, in his mind.

No, no, no, that's absent history now, he thought, mentally shaking his head.

Right, this was about Sanae.

He didn't have much time left to think. Whatever answer he gave her, it had to be before they got to his house, and they were already far into the streets to his home.

The silence lengthened.

Sanae was a good girl. Plus, even Kyouhei had long since noticed the womanly features hidden behind her glasses and plain hairstyle.

But...

"Ah..." Sanae suddenly said in surprise from next to him.

Kyouhei looked at her, wondering what had prompted it, and saw her looking at the sky. He followed suit, looking up. There, he saw fluttering, swirling fragments of white.

He'd thought it had been an awfully cloudy day.

"It's snowing..."

It was a little out of season, but it was probably one of those freak weather patterns you often heard about on TV. Sanae was so taken with the snow that her expression softened and cleared as she lifted a hand out to the snow.

Watching her, he was struggling by how normal a girl she was.

"So pretty..." she whispered.

The snow fell on her hand in large clumps. If it piled up, then it would be horribly cold, but the air was rather warm for snow, so the flakes were already half melted by the time they reached her. So, when they did, they spent the briefest moment on her hand before melting into water.

Kyouhei remained silent.

Obviously they'd melt like that on a person's skin.

Would they melt like that on her hand too? Kyouhei wondered, considering the self-proclaimed android, Pamil. *An android, huh?*

Even now, he didn't know who she really was. Whether she was an android, or just loopy... At any rate, she ate and slept just like anyone. She bathed, went to the toilet, and if you touched her, she was soft and warm.

But...

She could fire beams from her eyes, stop a truck with a single hand, generate fire and lightning, and easily tear through handcuffs.

However open-minded you were, that was clearly abnormal. An abnormality impossible to explain away as a personal skill.

I...

Kyouhei wanted a normal life; to just fade into the background as one of the crowd. His wish was a rebellion against his insane father, and the many near-death experiences he'd had whilst being dragged around the world by him.

He wanted to fall in love normally, marry normally, have kids normally, live for raising his kids normally, and finally take his last breaths normally, surrounded by his children and grandchildren. That was the kind of life he wanted.

Therefore, a partner that had eye beams was absurd. And the day his child did the same would be the day he gave up on life.

So, what about Sanae?

Actually, if Pamil really is an android, we couldn't even have kids... Wait, wait a minute; that's a bit of a leap there. Calm down, he thought to himself.

The shock at his own thoughts was sending them off down unrelated tracks. In the first place, it was very rare nowadays to marry the first person you dated.

But...

If she's really an android... then she'd never... be able to realistically think about love...

Those thoughts in his mind, he looked back from the sky to his side.

And there, he met Sanae's gaze as she thought seriously, making his breath catch in his throat. "Senpai," she said, being rarely—very rarely for her—forceful as she spoke to him. "...I don't have any amazing powers like Pamil-chan, but I love you as much as anyone."

Kyouhei's expression was overwhelmed. She had clearly told him her feelings; he couldn't falter now. "Murata-san..."

“It doesn’t matter how amazing Pamil-chan is. I know I’m nowhere near as cute as she is... I’m not beautiful. And I’m not strong enough to use beams and fire—”

“No, that’s fine. You don’t need that,” Kyouhei interjected instinctively.

Sanae didn’t seem to have heard him, though, and just continued seriously: “But I... really... really love you, Senpai!” she said flusteredly.

She couldn’t get her feelings properly into words, and now everything was spilling out like a broken dam.

...I, Kyouhei thought to himself, suddenly self-recriminating, seriously didn’t notice a girl loved me this much...?

That was far too cruel, he decided.

And yet...

“Senpai,” she addressed him.

He had no answer to give her.

“You... still haven’t... told me your answer... to my first request...”

‘Please go out with me.’ It was a phrase as commonplace as they come, but it meant everything to adolescent girls and boys.

“I...” he started.

What did he feel?

Since he had met Pamil, things had been chaotic—impossible, even. Memories of chasing around after the very embodiment of absurdity day after day went rushing through his head like a zoetrope.

He then had a premonition... This could be his only chance for a ‘normal’ romance.

Right at that moment, he felt a strange sensation caressing his back. He looked over his shoulder.

“Senpai...?” Sanae asked curiously.

“Ah... I just...” he said vaguely, but even so, could still feel an ethereal

something digging into him.

Someone was watching him. Focusing on him and Sanae. A shudder ran down his back. It might just be baseless paranoia, but he still had a bad feeling about it.

Pamil wouldn't sneak up behind us... Nah, definitely not.

She didn't go back on her word. And regardless, she saw Kyouhei as her brother and nothing else; she wouldn't get jealous of him being alone with Sanae...

...I guess I'm just nervous, he decided, scratching at the back of his neck.

Any gazes he felt on him were just because he was too self-conscious, he told himself.

However...

"Herr Kyouhei Nanbu?" someone asked him in a calm tone of voice. The voice itself was brusque and cold, though, almost like a machine. "What should I say here, I wonder," he continued in Japanese, fluently. "Japanese is a beautiful language, but truly difficult. Ah, that's the word: *namaste*—wait, no." He snapped his fingers, covered by white gloves, as he remembered the word he wanted. "*Hajimemashite*, that's it. It means it is the first time you've seen someone, and it is indeed the first time we've met face-to-face."

Kyouhei reflexively shifted, ready. It was just intuition, in the end. Even disregarding that, though, the man was clearly out of place.

Snow was falling silently around the warehouses. It was a familiar sight to Kyouhei. The only thing out of place was that person, wearing black high-laced boots, a black beret, and an overcoat—black, of course. The overcoat had several metal stars sewn into its collar, and a simple rank insignia on its epaulets. The beret on his head had an embroidered emblem of two intertwined snakes. In other words, it was blatantly a military uniform.

Maybe the person could have been wearing that just because he was a military enthusiast. However, the man's very bearing wouldn't permit such a peaceful assumption. Anyone would be able to tell—this man had killed people. Over and over, as a vocation, like cracking an egg, emotionlessly.

“Who are you?” Kyouhei asked, stepping forward and pushing Sanae behind him.

“I am from the 44th Infantry Regiment of the Manninger Commonwealth, Eugen Friedhelm Walser. I hold the rank of Colonel.”

“The Manninger Commonwealth?”

It was a name he’d heard before. But where?

“You wouldn’t have heard of it; it’s a country with a rather meager history, having only been established a little under a year ago. Two years prior it was called the Bergmann Kingdom.”

Kyouhei gasped. Of course he’d heard about it; it had come up in the news about the kingdom’s collapse. The connection between those two things—the Bergmann Kingdom and the Colonel—linked together in Kyouhei’s mind, bringing back a memory.

He’s... from back then!

This was the man that had called Kyouhei when Pamil had been kidnapped.

“Indeed,” Colonel Walser smiled thinly, as if reading Kyouhei’s mind, “we have spoken by phone before.”

His hand still on Sanae, he glanced behind himself. He was clearly a danger. Kyouhei’s instincts told him that.

There were many value systems in the world: those that would mobilize their military to save a single dog, and those that would treat human lives as easily as dead leaves to be swept aside. This man was most definitely in the latter camp. Consequently, running to a more crowded area like the business district would...

“Now,” he spoke, raising a hand as if he could see Kyouhei’s panic. In an instant, they were surrounded by dozens of guns.

Soldiers carrying assault rifles appeared simultaneously all around, wearing urban camouflage. They were at the sides of warehouses, on the roofs, even in the shade of containers.

“S-Senpai...” Sanae whimpered, touching his back. He could spare no

attention for conversation, though.

He could tell from their gear. They had laser sights and suppressors. Their guns had foldable stocks like a paratrooper's, probably for ease of concealment.

They weren't ordinary soldiers. Nor were they a legitimate platoon. They were probably special forces, or a group specialized in unofficial operations. In that case, they wouldn't hesitate in the slightest to fire, and the two of them, and any passing witnesses, would be shot.

Illustrating his thoughts, several red spots converged on his and Sanae's bodies from the laser sights.

"Now that we understand each other's positions, let's move to the topic at hand," said Colonel Walser. "Won't you hand over the former first-in-line to the Bergmann throne, Pamil Terrill Karl Bergmann?"

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"Are you sure?" asked the Corvette's owner, Kaoruko Houwa, gently. "Do you want to leave the two of them alone?"

Her conversation partner, Pamil, was sipping absently at a cup of Darjeeling. "...Is there a problem with doing that?" she asked with a frown.

"I meeeaaan," she trilled, putting her hands on her cheeks, "Sanae-chan just confessed to Kyouhei-kun, didn't she?"

Pamil blinked several times in puzzlement before answering in a murmur. "She did."

Kaoruko suddenly cocked her head at Pamil.

Pamil wasn't acting like she usually did, so Kaoruko was sure she'd realized. Airheaded and easygoing as Kaoruko might have been, she wasn't at all dense or stupid.

"So... what? A person telling another they love them... cannot be a bad thing," Pamil expressed.

"Well, that's true," Kaoruko admitted, before transitioning to the tone you'd use to explain something to a child, explaining things clearly and even more calmly: "You know that love is part of romance, right?"

“...Something like that.”

“If things go well between them, Kyouhei-kun will become Sanae-chan’s boyfriend... her lover. Are you okay with that?”

Pamil’s eyes widened. Her expression remained that way for several moments before she spoke: “That doesn’t matter. Sanae is my friend, and a good person. If she becomes Kyouhei’s lover, or even his wife, I’ll be happy for them. I’d never—”

Mid-sentence, Pamil reached for the plate of snacks and made a slight error in her movements, which meant she bumped into the plate’s surface rather than picking up a cookie. With a sharp snap, the plate broke right in two.

“Hm...? Sorry, Kaoruko, I misjudged my strength.” Kaoruko just looked at her. “That’s odd; maybe my pressure sensors aren’t working properly,” she said to excuse herself. As if avoiding the slight smile on Kaoruko’s face, she looked behind her and spoke more loudly, as if telling herself: “Well... they should be home by now.”

“Isn’t that even worse? They are a young pair after all.”

They were alone, where no one could see; that was practically an invitation.

“Pair?”

“If they get in the mood, they might even kiss.” Pamil looked silently at her. “They might have gone even further,” Kaoruko added.

Pamil might not have been aware of it herself... but there was a deep line in between her eyebrows.

And it was gradually deepening.

“Girls like Sanae-chan really let go when they get going,” Kaoruko continued, strangely happily. She certainly was like that, hence her sudden confession. “Ah, I’m so worried,” Kaoruko declared as she looked into the sky, her words completely at odds with her tone.

“N-No, they won’t be alone.”

“Eh? They won’t?”

“Indeed, it’s fine. There’s someone else at home now: Shuuhei,” Pamil said. But in that same moment...

“Hm, I’m what?” asked the man in question, accompanied by the sound of a cowbell as he entered the café, probably having heard the tail end of the sentence.

His current outfit was a *judogi*, by the way. It wasn’t completely ridiculous for clothing... but they weren’t in a twenty-year-old martial arts manga, and no one just wandered the town in such an outfit. Even worse, his right breast had the word ‘dad’ printed across it on a brushstroke font. On top of all that, his footwear was a pair of sandals on bare feet, completely out of season.

As ever, who knew why he was wearing it.

Well, disregarding that.

“Shuuhei,” Pamil murmured absently.

Conversely, Kaoruko gave him a warm welcome: “Oh, Shuuhei-san, come on in.”

Having fully entered the café, he rubbed his arms. “Hey. It’s so cold...! One Kaoruko-chan blend, please.”

As he spoke, he sat next to Pamil. It was the perfect time to make a quip about how he should have worn warmer clothes, but unfortunately, the common sense committee member, his son, wasn’t there.

“So, what about me?” Shuuhei asked.

“Well now...” Kaoruko started, placing a steaming cup of coffee she’d somehow already brewed in front of him. Then, she began explaining the circumstances.

“Oh oh!” he exclaimed, folding his arms and being overcome with emotion. “Even Kyouhei really is getting to that age! What a day! My boy is finally becoming a man!”

“Hmm? ‘Becoming a man’?” Pamil asked, not catching the subtleties.

“Yup, that’s right. After all, when a man and woman around that age are

alone... particularly after a confession, there's no way they'd do nothing. Kids these days are really open-minded to that stuff."

"That stuff?"

"They say 'shameful is the man who eats not the meal set before him.' They're probably going full snu-snu..." He let out a perverse giggle.

"Snu-snu?" Pamil asked.

"Yup."

"What's snu-snu?"

"Well, putting it in a picture, it'd be like this," Shuuhei answered, drawing a ♂ and a ♀.

"Hmm? Hm? Hm?" Even with that, she still didn't get it.

So...

"Umm," Kaoruko interjected, "if I said 'copulation,' then you might get it?"

Pamil flew out of her seat. Actually, it was more like the chair was yanked back like in wire-fu films, crashing into the wall and falling to the floor, leaving a crater behind in the wall.

It was probably for the best that it was such a slow business day. If there had been someone behind her, they'd have been smashed into by the chair, and probably injured.

"...How could you?!" Pamil exclaimed, clenching her fist. "How obscene! To think that being alone with a girl who just confessed to you held such a shameful meaning in Japan! I misjudged you, Kyouhei!"

Kyouhei would have quipped about that being a thing only for some people, and that it wasn't a specifically Japanese practice, but he wasn't there (and so on).

"Besides," she continued, "isn't he being too reserved?!"

"Reserved?" Shuuhei asked, taking on the role of the straight man for once.

"I should come to mind first for particular closeness; I'm his sister! If he wanted snu-snu, he should have come to me first!"

She was far, far off the mark in a few ways, but neither Shuuhei nor Kaoruko had the sense to point that out.

On the contrary, with a sigh for good measure, Kaoruko spoke to her: “But it’s Kyouhei-kun and Sanae-chan who are alone right now.”



There was a roar, and in the next moment, Pamil had burst through the door of the Corvette. The bell dropped from its perch and came clattering to the floor.

“Kaoruko-chan,” Shuuhei said, as the two left behind watched her rapidly leave, “nice one!” He gave her an energetic thumbs up.

“Yay, praise from Shuuhei-san♪” Kaoruko cheered, her face flushing as she put her hands to her cheeks.

“Still, Pamil hadn’t realized it at all until now,” Shuuhei pointed out with a shocked expression.

“Apparently not.”

“I guess the reset really unbalanced her knowledge and experiences... For real,” Shuuhei said, a reluctant grin upon his lips.

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Meanwhile, with Kyouhei.

Of course, he was certainly not engaged in copulation. He was surrounded by a group in urban camouflage—a special forces squad from the Manninger Commonwealth—and seated on the floor of his home.

Naturally, Sanae was seated next to him with a timid expression on her face.

“S-Senpai... who... who are these people...?” she asked, quivering like a small animal as she burrowed into his side.

“Remember when Pamil got kidnapped?” he whispered, tightening his arm around her shoulder.

“Ah... I do.”

“They’re probably working with the people who did it.”

“Then... Pamil-chan...”

The man calling himself Colonel Walser didn’t seem to be the kind of person to joke in this kind of situation.

However...

“You’re misunderstanding,” Kyouhei called to the colonel’s back. “There’s no Princess Pamil here.”

“Oh?” Walser asked, lifting an eyebrow as he looked back at Kyouhei. “I spent a lot of time and money confirming it. You have spent nearly a year living with her.”

Of course, if you were infiltrating the country with an armed group, you’d obviously spare no effort in getting confirmation.

“But that isn’t Princess Pamil, it’s her body double android! Besides, why now? Who cares about some android of a dead royal family?! And yeah, she might be as good as a weapon, but—”

“An android?” the colonel asked, cutting rudely across Kyouhei. “How absurd. Modern technology could hardly create an android indistinguishable from a human.”

“Huh? But...”

“The Bergmann Kingdom was indeed advanced in simulacra and cloning. Even if they were able to replicate her appearance, her abilities would be impossible.”

“Abilities...?”

“We too were deceived at first, actually,” the colonel shrugged. It was a carefree, smug action, but there was not even an ounce of happiness on his face. It was uncanny, almost like he was a machine imitating a human. “There were many things that looked like corpses scattered around the ruins of the palace after the explosion. We were sure that all members of the royal family were deceased.” Kyouhei looked silently at him. “But then, when we investigated after the fact, we found they were exquisite fakes. *Those* were the body doubles,” the colonel declared.

“Then...”

The real was a fake.

And the fake was the real one.

Which meant...

“The girl living with you is the real Princess Pamil. To escape our pursuit, she disguised herself as a doll and escaped the palace. Using hypnosis to change her personality, she became a ‘different person.’”

“B-But...” Kyouhei gasped, “then, the lightning, and the superhuman strength...”

“Indeed, that is one of the problems,” the colonel said with a nod. “Those are the abilities of the Bergmann family—their bloodline all have unusual powers. Princess Pamil, in particular, was said to have been the strongest among them since her birth. The dignitaries of the new government are scared of her; they fear that she will use her abilities to overthrow them and take back the throne. She is literally superhuman, and there are many who still revere the royal family as living gods.”

Kyouhei stared aghast.

So that was the reason they had brought such a huge group to capture a single girl, and had even taken hostages in the form of Kyouhei and Sanae.

Even Pamil wouldn’t be able to take dozens of guns at a time. They might even have grenades and bazookas as well.

...*Pamil...*! Kyouhei cried out mentally.

If she came home, she’d probably be killed. He almost felt like throwing up at the image of countless bullets tearing through her pale skin.

He couldn’t have known. His frantic pleas of “stay away” were even now being betrayed by Pamil racing towards him.

Chapter 4 - For I Have Always Been By Your Side (II)

A peaceful life was fleeting.

So thought Kyouhei Nanbu.

As far as he was concerned, it was something that could be destroyed by any number of tiny little things. An accident, mistake, illness, disaster, or... violence.

People living in Japan might not feel that way, but life was nothing more than a huge house of cards, waiting to topple down, as far as Kyouhei was concerned. He'd seen it happen time and again.

Boredom was unthinkable. Exactly because Kyouhei thought of it as something he might lose at any moment, he immersed himself in an unchanging, everyday life, and was so particular about being normal and ordinary.

However...

"...What a dilemma."

The person speaking, looking down at him, was the embodiment of the abnormality he couldn't escape from. Appearance-wise, he was a typical middle-aged man. He was wearing a military outfit, though, and had a dozen or so men armed with automatic rifles at his disposal, smashing Kyouhei's beloved normalcy to smithereens.

They were in Japan, a country with a rule of law. It was a country that could turn away unsanctioned military action and diplomatic interference. This armed force being right in the middle of such a country was, of course, a violation of international law.

Still...

"If you will not tell us Princess Pamil's whereabouts, then we shall have to resort to more forceful measures," the middle-aged man—Colonel Walser—said.

They were in the Nanbu house—or rather, the warehouse that went by that name. Countless boxes and containers were piled high, and formed a maze-like warren of paths. Kyouhei and his schoolmate Sanae Murata were both tied to an iron pillar in a corner of the warehouse.

At a rough estimation, there were around 20 soldiers—enough for a platoon—standing guard, armed to the teeth. Judging from their equipment and uniform, they were a special forces squad; men who would kill military and civilians alike if it accomplished their objective.

And right now, their objective was Pamil.

Pamil Terrill Karl Bergmann, the princess of the abolished Bergmann Kingdom, a girl who claimed that she was a body double for the real princess, and a walking supernatural phenomenon that wielded lightning, fire, and other powers. ...And she was Kyouhei's sister, legally speaking.

Apparently, the soldiers thought her to be the real Princess Pamil.

“I just thought I'd let you know, just in case,” the colonel said, purposely affable. He was speaking in Japanese, incidentally, so Sanae, bound with Kyouhei, could understand him as well. Of course, this wasn't out of the kindness of his heart—quite the opposite. “Don't assume you can stand up to torture. Wolfgang Lotz said the same: most people cannot keep secrets under torture. There are rare cases of people dying before saying anything, but that is usually assumed to be because the torturer went too far and killed them before they talked.”

Kyouhei glared silently at him. That was all he could currently do. That, and wonder who Wolfgang Lotz was.

However, the colonel continued, cold-blooded: “The methods have changed over the past five years. Crude blows and needles under the nails aren't the only forms of torture. Well, they are certainly a curious spectacle, and quite effective too.”

“You mean you're not going to leave marks?” Kyouhei said.

“Not at all,” Walser said, happy with Kyouhei's response. “Whether we leave marks or not... it's such a trifling matter. Why concern ourselves with it?”

In other words... he had no intention to let them leave alive, and he'd dispose of their bodies such that they'd never be found. They got an entire special forces squad into the country without notice; a body bag or two wouldn't pose much more difficulty.

"She's got nothing to do with this," Kyouhei said, switching to English. Speaking in Japanese was just making Sanae more scared for no reason.

"Oh, 'nothing to do with it,' hmm?" Walser mockingly wondered, purposefully continuing in Japanese. The conversation itself could be called a form of torture. "How chivalrous. Young lady, he's asking me to let you go because you have nothing to do with this. To worry about someone else when he himself is in danger... My, my! He certainly is worthy of respect."

"Why... Why are you doing this?" Sanae asked as she shuddered. "The country is already under your government's control, isn't it...?"

"It is as I explained earlier," he said. "The revolution was successful, and the monarchy was abolished. The country has now been reinstated as a Commonwealth, but, little lady," he said, looming over her, "you might not feel it in a peaceful country like this one... but our country isn't so stable as to just go along with a new government."

There hadn't been a revolution in Japan for a long time. The last would have been the revolution that changed the government about 100 years ago with the demise of the Edo Shogunate and the return to Imperial rule. The bloodless surrender of the Edo Castle had become symbolic, and was far removed from a civil war involving the whole country.

"As long as all offices are not fully stabilized, it's easy for discontent to flourish among the citizens," he continued. "There are of course backward-looking people who say the last government was better. If a member of the royal family, the center of that previous government, were to come to light, they would elevate them and possibly establish the monarchy once again." He then let out a sigh. "The royal family... didn't just sit atop the country maintaining their own interests and traditions."

Sanae and Kyouhei remained silent.

"As I said earlier, they have abnormal abilities. You could call them

superpowers. There was a large variation in their scope, but they could lift boulders single-handedly, call down lightning and fire... Those abilities are a real threat. Many of the citizens still see the royal family, blessed with those abilities, as living gods.”

“So what?” Kyouhei demanded. If he could get the colonel talking, it would buy them time—time for Shuuhei to notice the issue or for him to think of something. “You still overthrew them, didn’t you?”

“Hmm?”

“Even if they can stop a truck on their own, they wouldn’t win against an army, would they? What has you so worked up—”

“Indeed, that’s the thing,” Colonel Walser agreed with a satisfied nod. “That is, in fact, the greatest fear the highest echelons of the government hold, and is also the reason behind them being called ‘saviors.’”

“Huh?”

“Despite being a small country in northern Europe, there are areas in which the Bergmann Kingdom was more advanced than even America or Japan. Why do you think that is?”

It was the first time he’d heard that. Actually, no, he had a feeling Shuuhei had said something similar. The Bergmann Kingdom was scientifically advanced, so its exports to other countries were important...

“Currently,” Walser continued, “scientific progress is a matter of trial and error. Spending more money and time, and performing more experiments, advances science. Consequently, there should be limits on scientific progress relative to how much territory a country has, along with its population and economic power. So a small country in northern Europe... would normally never be able to catch up with leaders in scientific fields.”

“...What? Are you saying that the royal family are all geniuses?”

Pamil certainly had far greater recall than the norm. Regardless, scientific development and the creation of new things required a different ability: inventiveness. Of course, they might have been supported by vast knowledge and intelligence, but even then there were still limits.

Honestly speaking, Kyouhei didn't think Pamil's talents lay in that direction. Inventiveness was a significantly individual skill, so the entire royal family being geniuses of technological inventiveness and scientific advancement seemed unlikely.

Which meant...

"Not at all," Walser said, shaking his head. "There certainly are many intelligent people in the family, but that's not all; they have another huge advantage."

"...Quit messing around and tell me already," Kyouhei groaned, glaring up at him.

"No, any more would be a state secret," was Walser's reply, however. "There are some things that even I cannot simply say."

Kyouhei started thinking. There must therefore be a reason they were still alive.

They probably wouldn't have gone so far as to kill Pamil just to stabilize the new government. If they wanted to kill her, they could have sniped her, poisoned her, or any number of things. Abnormal abilities or not, she wouldn't be able to stand up to a hypersonic bullet from a distance. She also ate normally, so adding poison to her food or drink wouldn't be hard. It was indeed illegal, but more efficient than sneaking a whole black ops group into the country, more reliable, and less likely to draw attention.

And yet, they had done exactly that, and considered the possibility of needing to face Pamil's superpowers head-on.

Kyouhei and Sanae would be hostages to deal with her. If they knew about Kyouhei, there was no way the colonel wouldn't have had her daily life investigated. They'd know the places she would stop on her way home too, so trying to persuade him to reveal her location wouldn't result in much—at worst, it was just killing time.

Therefore, we're hostages so he can get that 'other reason.'

In that case, their lives wouldn't be taken until Pamil came back. While guaranteed survival was good, they might have a bone or two broken...

Pamil...!

Whatever the case, it was for the best that Pamil wasn't here. Shuuhei returning first would be their most valuable card if he noticed something was wrong. At least, with the military-level security system being broken, he would definitely have been alerted.

Regardless of his personality—or actually, because of it—Shuuhei shone in desperate situations like this. If he didn't, he wouldn't have been able to hum his way along the tightrope of the boundary between illegality and legality while doing his trading.

At any rate...

Pamil... don't come back, he prayed—the only thing he could do.

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Meanwhile, with Pamil.

Completely counter to Kyouhei's hopes, she was racing through the shopping district like a girl possessed.

“Kyoooooooooooooooouuuuuuuuheeeeeiiiiiii!” she yelled more energetically than her usual laid-back—or less politely, airheaded—disposition. “I won't allow it! Snu-snu with Sanae while Shuuhei is out...”

And so she went, sprinting along as she ran her mouth in a way that would surely draw questions.

Her normally nonchalant mind had short-circuited in a single millisecond at Shuuhei and Kaoruko's instigation.

Let us examine that process:

‘Sanae loves Kyouhei and confessed, asking him to go out with her.’

↓

‘That is a sign of the most affection possible.’

↓

‘Close men and women in Japan engage in snu-snu (so to speak) when alone.’



‘Shuuhei isn’t even at home now; he’s having a drink in the Corvette.’



‘So when they get home, Kyouhei and Sanae will be alone.’



‘Therefore Kyouhei and Sanae will be snu-snu-ing at home!’

...

Well, there were a lot of extreme assumptions being made in her reasoning, like whether Kyouhei would take her home, the ‘in Japan’ part, and so on that would create a lot of questions, but...

“Besides, I’m your sister; shouldn’t you be closer to me?! You’re ignoring me and having snu-snu with another girl; it doesn’t make sense!”

If anything, it was her perspective that didn’t make sense!

For better or worse, though, there was no one around with the common sense to tell her this.

In the first place, despite her vast amounts of knowledge, Pamil was utterly lacking common sense. She was like a kindergartener declaring she’d marry their big brother once they grew up.

Regardless.

“Oh?”

There were many people watching her curiously—she was somewhat of a celebrity in the area—but none felt like chasing or calling after the sprinting girl.

...Excluding one attention seeker, who very much did feel like it. “Huh, it’s Pamil-chan. Heeyyy, Paaamiiiiil-chaaan?”

The tone of his voice sounded like he was about to add an overenthusiastic request to play... and the guy calling to her was honestly the most likely to do something like that.

It was Mizuhito Hibiki.

Incidentally, as ever, he had his guitar on his back to draw attention, and his usual tattoo on his face, but there was more to him today—he was astride a granny bike that had a nameplate attached to it with the name of a Buddhist *bodhisattva*: Skanda.

The bike's basket had a shopping bag with a lamé—it had probably been custom-ordered to stand out even more—as well as radishes and spring onions hanging out of it. He must have been on his way back from shopping. The partial 'average Joe' or family-oriented impression had ruined the test, but he didn't seem bothered by it.

"Hmm?!" Pamil exclaimed as she ran, looking to the side. "Oh, it's you, Mizuhito."

"Yup, I'm your friendly neighbor Mizuhito!" Even as he pedaled away on his bike, he raised a hand in a salute. (Doing this while riding is dangerous, so don't try this at home). "Where are you rushing off to, Pamil-chan?"

Normally, a person would have questioned needing the bike to keep up with Pamil's running speed, but for better or worse, this boy was not normal, of course.

"Home," Pamil answered. If she had left it there, things may have gone differently, but Pamil wasn't in her normal frame of mind, and her idea of common sense and shame was significantly different than the norm, therefore... "I'm going to stop Kyouhei and Sanae from having snu-snu!" she declared.

That she did.

"Snu-snu..." Mizuhito said, folding his arms in thought as he cycled. (This is dangerous while riding, so don't try... etc.). "Oh, the staircase to adulthood?!" he finally said, clapping his hands in realization and nodding. (This is dangerous, so... etc.).

"Hm?! The staircase of adulthood?!" Pamil asked as she ran.

Incidentally, there was a car that was shocked at them rushing down the middle of the road which hit the guardrail between the road and the pavement in an attempt to avoid them. Of course, though, the two didn't pay it any mind.

“When a guy,” Mizuhito almost sang, looking into the distance. (It’s dangerous, etc.). “...has snu-snu with a girl, they become an adult. It’s farewell boyhood days. Now, with all of my heart...” he said before narrowing his eyes and raising his hands. (It’s dangerous etc.). He then yelled: “Kyouhei, you bastard, it’s not fair! Getting it on your own is so fishy—I mean, reserved!”

“Hmm?!”

“I haven’t even done it yet!” he declared, beating his handlebar.

Surprisingly, despite his punk rocker looks which would make you think he’d long since had his first time, he was fairly innocent with girls it seemed.

“You haven’t?!”

“I haven’t! Every time I suggest doing it on a roof and charging spectators so we stand out, they slap me.”

...Or apparently not. He might just be a simple pervert.

Ignoring that though.

“I haven’t either!” Pamil declared too.

“Oh, what a coincidence!”

“Indeed!”

Who knew what they were talking about at this point, but the two of them didn’t have an ounce... (you get the idea).

And what with the two of them yelling everything as they raced through the shopping district, they’d left sanity far behind.

“Looks like we’re in agreement, Pamil-chan!”

“Indeed!”

“Let’s work together to stop Kyouhei from climbing the staircase of adulthood!”

“Oh! You’ll help, Mizuhito?!”

“Yeah! You thinking the same way is perfect! Kyouhei, aren’t we friends?! I ain’t gonna let you go ahead alone!”

...Things had gone wrong all over the place with them, but the two showed no sign of care. They left behind the people watching on—who were beyond astounded at this point—and burst into the warehouse district.



In the end, Kyouhei and Sanae hadn't been tortured.

Despite the colonel's threats, modern intelligence doctrine held that torture was not to be relied upon. The answer someone gave under torture wasn't guaranteed to be the truth. Rather than it being an active lie, many answered with what the torturer wanted to hear.

Plus, if Kyouhei's read on the situation that they held more value as hostages was true, then the colonel might be concerned that treating them roughly could just send Pamil into a rage. Thus, they were tied to a pillar, two guns constantly pointed at them.

It looked like only the colonel spoke Japanese. Kyouhei had tried speaking to their captors several times, but they had absolutely no response to either torrents of abuse or persuasion.

So...

"Sorry, Murata-san," he said, starting Sanae.

"Nanbu-senpai..." she answered in a quavering voice, probably feeling hopeless.

"Sorry you got caught up in something so strange."

"Y-You did too, didn't you...?"

"Nah, it's a bit different," Kyouhei grumbled.

If Pamil was the real princess like the colonel claimed, then Shuuhei had been involved in getting them out of the country. He'd said that he'd negotiated to take some of their trash instead of the outstanding payment... But if the royal family had planned to disguise themselves as their doubles, then they wouldn't have arranged for such a dangerous destination for the coffins with themselves inside.

Taking the general junk would have been a plan readied before the

revolution, and it would make sense that Shuuhei would help with it. Besides, Shuuhei would have been fairly close to the royal family after his cousin married into it. In that case, considering his normal smuggling habits, he was the perfect assistant to help them flee the country.

“My old man’s an idiot, and there’s no way I’ll escape the messes he causes...”

It really was too late to be finding that out, and he couldn’t honestly call it a shocking revelation.

However...

“...So Pamil-chan really was a princess...” Sanae suddenly murmured.

“Apparently so.”

Even those strange powers made more sense as ‘superpowers’ than her being an android. Her coming out of that mechanical coffin, with the steam along with her own claims, had just kept the word android stuck in his mind...

“A princess... huh?” he muttered, the word bringing the image of a blonde-haired, blue-eyed girl at the side of a castle to mind. Until Sanae’s confession, this had been the extent of his frivolous relationships with girls for Kyouhei. “... No way, right?”

Shuuhei had a connection with the Bergmann royal family.

Pamil was a blonde-haired, blue-eyed princess.

These two facts connecting in Kyouhei’s mind and his comparison of them brought a single possibility to mind.

“No no no no no no no!” Kyouhei exclaimed, shaking his head frantically.

“S-Senpai?”

“It’s nothing, absolutely nothing. Hahahaha hahaha,” he insisted, trying to laugh it off.

But...

“...Senpai,” Sanae said, suddenly remembering something, “um... could you... give me your answer?”

“My answer? What?” he asked, before finally realizing that he had given no

answer to her confession. “Ah... I mean, um, I don’t think it’s quite the situation for it.” As he spoke, he watched the muzzles pointing at them out of the corner of his eyes.

Walser might intend to use them as hostages, but a hostage didn’t need to be whole and hale. They were currently on what may as well have been a crumbling precipice—if they weren’t careful, there could be fire spitting from those muzzles.

However...

“It’s because... of the situation,” Sanae said, her eyes downcast. “I mean... we might not... make it out alive, mightn’t we...?”

At that, Kyouhei couldn’t find a rebuttal.

It’s not like I dislike her... Kyouhei thought.

She might have one or two odd hobbies, but it was all in moderation. Well, compared to Pamil, so were most people’s.

He actually thought she was pretty cute. She was wholehearted, earnest, and honest.

But...

It would have been simple to just give the okay to cheer her up, but Kyouhei hesitated to say such heartless words—or to even consider doing so—to Sanae.

“...I thought not... You... couldn’t like me, could you...?” Sanae murmured, her mood gradually darkening. Well, that was her normal behavior, to be fair.

“No, that’s not it. I just honestly hadn’t thought about it before,” Kyouhei admitted with a sigh. “I’ve only been able to keep up with myself. My dad’s absurd, and I don’t even know my mom. I’ve been dragged across the world ever since I was a kid... I’ve only ever been focused on trying to be able to live a calm, normal life. I’ve really just thought about having an ordinary life—not romance or anything.”

“...Oh, haven’t you...?” Sanae asked, an expression of surprise on her face.

Now that he thought about it, Kyouhei realized that he hadn’t really spoken about his past with his schoolmate.

“But, Senpai... you’re really strong when it comes down to it,” she told him.

“Huh? I am?”

“Even now...”

She wasn’t exactly wrong. Normal people might well be in utter disarray and unable to even think in their situation.

“Well...” he temporized.

“It was the same when Pamil-chan was kidnapped...” she said with a slight smile. “You get angry at things... but you’re always yourself.”

“Huh?”

What did she mean by that? he wondered. Obviously Kyouhei would always be himself; he couldn’t be anyone else.

“Ah... I mean,” she explained, avoiding his gaze as her cheeks pinkened, “normally, when someone’s pushed into a corner, their personality changes. They act strangely in ways they never normally would.”

Actually... Sanae being this talkative was different than usual, and she gave a slightly different impression. Considering her reserved nature, her being so assertive in conversation was in some way her being at her wit’s end, or acting differently in an extreme situation.

“But you really don’t change at your core—you’re always and ever yourself...”

“Well,” he began, not sure whether to be happy about that or not, never having been told that before. She had probably said it out of admiration, but if people ‘normally’ lost themselves in those situations, that meant she was basically pointing out that he wasn’t normal.

“And I...” she murmured, her face growing steadily redder, “really love that about you.”

“Er... Umm...” he sputtered, unable to find a reply.

The embarrassment led to him being unable to look at her, though.

A long silence fell.



While they didn't understand Japanese, the soldiers seemed to infer what was happening from the atmosphere, and they looked aghast at Kyouhei.

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Emmitt frowned as she peered through the compact binoculars—or rather, opera glasses. “Sis,” she said.

“When we’re working—”

“Elsia, something strange is happening,” Emmitt interrupted, not letting Elsia finish her complaint about being called ‘Sis’ while they were working.

Elsia and Emmitt—the two of them were originally freelance informants for Colonel Walser. They had detested the boring family trade back in Potsdam and left home before entering this line of work.

There were only a certain number of freelance informants at a given time. They were never given particularly important duties, just simple surveillance. Often, they were used—as disposable pawns, essentially—for low-success and ridiculous missions. There were only a certain number of jobs, and should they fail, or be caught by enemy forces, they would still be external agents to their hiring organizations, so there would be no risk of an information leak.

Well, there were a lot of things going for their reliability.

Leaving that to one side...

“Something strange?” Elsia asked over the radio.

The sisters were often split into two units: one to maintain surveillance and one to monitor for movement further away. The closer one would maintain the surveillance, and the other would secure transport should the contact one lose sight.

On this occasion, Emmitt was on a scooter close by, while Elsia was a little ways away in a small car.

“The observation target is heading for the Nanbu house at great speed.”

“You said that earlier,” Elsia said irritably, in a poor mood because it was the second day of her period. “The colonel’s troops are deployed, so it’s

perfect, right? There's that saying in Japan about dark lines."

"The saying's about a duck with a leek," Emmitt corrected her. "There's more of them now though."

"More?"

"Yeah. There's that... acquaintance of the target, Mizuhito Hibiki, and..."

"...And?"

"It looks pretty shifty..."

The 'shifty thing' then roared past Emmitt as she spoke. "You little shiiiiits! Hold the fuck up!" issued a voice from it.

The 'it' was a white Mercedes, an AMG at that. It had gone trim as well, and had dark tinted windows. It may as well have had 'gangster-mobile' painted on it. The front had a massive dent in it, and it was chasing after Pamil and Mizuhito.

It was the car that had hit the guardrail trying to avoid them when they'd stepped out into the road.

Whether the two noticed or not, they just kept going. The car might have been racing against someone on foot and another on a bike, but the road they were taking was fairly difficult to drive on, so the Merc's—with its size—had a hard time catching up. In fact, it was taking more and more damage on the way, which was just making the driver angrier and angrier.

"It won't be good if the target reaches the house with that on its tail, will it? The whole thing is illegal."

So obviously it would be better to keep witnesses to a minimum.

"Let's just report it to the colonel," Elsia said.

"That's probably for the best," Emmitt nodded, cutting off the transmission. She let out a sigh and started the scooter's engine.

But then...

"You there in the Mercedes! Stop!"

The whine of sirens started up as a black-and-white car passed her.



Of course, Pamil wasn't paying the gangsters or the police car behind her the slightest bit of attention.

Mizuhito, being himself, was relishing the attention, so was as far from fear and panic as you might expect.

The two of them burst straight into the warehouse district.

Although...

"Kyouhei's so outrageous!" Pamil condemned as she ran.

"Right! He's outrageous!" Mizuhito agreed.

"Sanae is a good person, but diving right into snu-snu just because she said she loved him is absurd!"

"Right! It's absurd!"

The two of them were completely convinced that that was the case.

"Besides! I told him that years ag— ...Hmm?" as she ran, she folded her arms in thought. "...What? Years ago?"

"What's up, Pamil-chan?"

"I'm sure I met Kyouhei a year ago."

"Sounds about right."

"Right, so why did I just say 'years ago'? Hmm?" she frowned at the contradiction in her words.

An instant passed.

Pamil blinked. She felt like something had gone past her mind, literally too fast to comprehend.

Another instant passed.

"Uraaaaggggh?!" The gangster car that was chasing them slipped, this time hitting a telephone pole head-on and coming to a stop.

"Hmm?"

Even Pamil stopped and looked at that.

The tire had suddenly burst. The car would have been moving at 30 kilometers per hour at best, but a blowout on a dirt road would cause a fair accident on its own.

However...

Pamil turned to look in the complete opposite direction from the Mercedes as the air hissed out.

“Royal Searcher Eye!” she yelled, narrowing her eyes.

Her eyesight, beyond any human—in fact, even falcons would tip their hats to it—caught sight of something about 150 meters away in a corner of the warehouse district.

That something? Part of a scoped rifle.

“Hmmm?!”

The shooter would never have expected that Pamil would spot them from such a distance. All that was visible was the muzzle of a gun protruding over a warehouse’s roof. A normal person would have simply thought it part of the warehouse.

“What’s up, Pamil-chan?” asked Mizuhito.

“...Humm,” she grumbled, her brow furrowed.

She was certain—that car had been sniped. Modern tires weren’t so easily punctured by nails or broken glass, and that was all the more true with low-speed city driving.

Pamil had noticed the unusual situation and clenched her fist, her arm shaking. “Damn you...”

“Pamil-chan?”

“Damn you! Why would you go so far?” Pamil demanded. “You’d go that far to have snu-snu with Sanae, Kyouhei?!”

She was completely wrong, but Kyouhei wasn’t there to make that point. The person who was with her was someone that’d go along with anything if he

found it funny—an idiot who'd sell his soul to the devil to stand out.

Therefore...

"Very well, then I shall unleash all of my strength to halt your snu-snu!"

"I don't really get it, but that's the spirit, Pamil-chan!"

"Right!"

There was of course no one to stop them. If anything, Pamil was sprinting towards the Nanbu house even more furiously now.

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"Rejoice," Walser said happily, looking down at them when he returned. "I've received intelligence from our scouts. Princess Pamil is heading in this direction."

Kyouhei let out a strangled cry.

It was over. Pamil would be here before Shuuhei could notice and do anything.

"There's apparently an additional hindrance with her, but we should be able to deal with that rather quickly. She will be here in another three minutes," the colonel added.

"Pamil-chan..." Sanae managed in a trembling voice.

Whatever would happen, Pamil arriving would change the situation. Still, against the colonel's troops, whatever powers Pamil had, she probably wouldn't be able to exfiltrate them both.

There was the very real possibility that Walser could arrange some kind of demonstration to make Pamil listen. Something like having Kyouhei or Sanae shot in a hand or foot. With two hostages, he might even kill one of them.

The only thing certain was that Colonel Walser was after some kind of information from Pamil—but what? The Bergmann Kingdom was anomalously advanced, and there was some cause for that unique to the royal family.

But...

Pamil came here with nothing, he thought. She'd not even had a shirt over her

shoulders.

In that case...

Is it something only the royal family know? Something like an ancient ruin? A lost legacy? You see that kind of stuff a lot in manga and anime...

A 'manual' to work from certainly would quicken any scientific or technological progress.

But...

If that were the case, then there was no need to take hostages and ask Pamil; there were several other ways to search for it. As mentioned earlier, she'd shown up here without a stitch of clothing, so it couldn't have been something material that she had herself—unless it was implanted inside her.

Damn it, I just don't know, Kyouhei sighed.

It was all just far too sudden. Pamil being a real princess, her having superpowers... Even that was surprising to Kyouhei, but he could more or less buy it—except for one thing.

...Pamil's current personality was just made after the fact to disguise her, Kyouhei suddenly thought. *Well, they simply made her lose her memories and then gave her those weird presumptions; they didn't change her personality itself.*

Creating a personality from nothing would be too much effort. Or maybe the 'advanced' Bergmann technology could do that without a moment's consideration.

At any rate, whatever he wants is something only Princess Pamil would know... So the weird body double fantasy is a data leak prevention method...?

On the other hand, the colonel might have had a way to restore her memories. At the end of the day, a masquerade that could never be undone was pretty meaningless. The people that had installed the delusion must have had some kind of 'key' to unseal her memories. Though whether that was possible here or if they'd need to return to the Manninger Commonwealth, the former Bergmann Kingdom...

“Now, the princess arrives,” the colonel announced, bringing Kyouhei back to the present.

A moment later...

"Kyoooooooooooooooooheeeeeiiiiii!"

That scream, along with a thunderous roar, filled the air.

Kyouhei and Sanae looked up in surprise. At the same time, the soldiers all turned to the source of the noise.

It had come from the entrance—the loading area. The large metal shutter was big enough for an entire truck to come through, and about four meters wide. It was normally sealed, and you couldn't open it. Because opening and closing it constantly was too much effort, they normally used the side entrance next to it, though.

However, that shutter was now open.

Or rather, the shutter was no more.

The door was supposed to slide open to the left and right, but it had bent right in the middle and then been blown up, along with the soldiers who had been guarding it.

The entrance gaped open, and standing there—haughtily and impossibly—was a slight figure. Her golden hair was gorgeous, lit behind by the setting sun.



“Pamil!” Kyouhei yelled.

Whether she knew what he was feeling or not, Pamil ignored the soldiers around and stalked inside the warehouse.

“No, run awa—” Kyouhei got out before being interrupted.

“Kyouhei!” she yelled, her elegant eyebrows bristling for some reason. Then...
“I won’t let you get away with hiding from me to snu-snu with Sanae!”

Of course, she still didn’t understand the situation.

Chapter 5 - For I Have Always Been By Your Side (III)

A hellish silence filled the area.

The shock made everyone forget to move—or even think.

There were certain things that, even if you had an inkling before that they would happen, actually having them occur right in front of you would make you freeze.

The location was, as ever, the Nanbu household. It was rather closer to being a warehouse than a house, and looked that way both inside and out. There was a minimal amount of living space here and there, but it was all somewhat of an afterthought. Construction-wise it was a simple building: walls and a roof supported by a dozen or so metal pillars, without even a single internal wall partitioning the space. Instead, there were huge piles of boxes and containers, eventually forming a veritable labyrinth.

Kyouhei Nanbu was restrained in a corner of that building. He and his junior, Sanae Murata, had been tied to one of the pillars as hostages.

Those responsible were soldiers from the far off land of the Manninger Commonwealth. They were a black-ops force under the command of Colonel Walser. As far as Kyouhei had seen, they were 20 men strong—about what you would call a platoon. They were all wearing urban camouflage gear and equipped with laser-sighted German rifles. They were as well trained as they were equipped. Their gear and movements made this clear even to Kyouhei, who was relatively inexperienced with military matters. The military took away part of its soldiers' half-baked humanity. Hesitation, indecision, fear, compassion, unease... all of these lowered the efficiency of their killing machines. By those metrics, Walser's squad was made up of ideal soldiers. Their unchanging faces and silent figures carrying out their work certainly made them look like machines; they didn't have any of the hesitations a normal human would when moving.

Now, however...

The soldiers were staring towards the entrance in shock, even the ones keeping Kyouhei and Sanae at gunpoint. They were looking motionlessly at the metal plate that had come to rest at their feet.

In other words, what had been the door.

The massive metal piece—that plate which until moments prior had covered the entrance—had crumpled right in the middle. It was originally a four-meter-wide sliding door that created an opening to unload trucks and trailers, and then covered the entrance in thick metal once closed. Of course, it was as tough as it was heavy. It was too difficult to open and close, so they usually used the side door to come and go.

And yet... that hefty door had been blown out of its tracks like it was paper or plastic, and now lay on the warehouse floor. The soldiers and goods that had been in its path were both obliterated, the soldiers writhing in muffled agony, probably with broken bones.

And, in the now-open entrance... stood a single girl.

Her backlit form was hard to make out from Kyouhei's position, but her long golden hair danced around her, shining in the sun at her back. Kyouhei couldn't tell whether her billowing hair was due to some wind current or else some hitherto unknown power her body held.

It was Pamil.

Officially, Harumi Nanbu.

She was now Kyouhei's little sister, but her slight form belied her calm-breaking abilities. She could fire beams from her eyes, shoot lightning from her hands, and stop an oncoming truck with a single one of those small hands.

And...

"Pamil..." Kyouhei muttered dazedly, before asking in disbelief, "what...?"

"You heard me," Pamil declared, giving no mind to the armed soldiers around, stalking into the warehouse. "I said I won't allow any snu-snu with Sanae behind my back!" You could almost feel the thunder sound through the air with her proclamation.

In answer, Kyouhei's jaw dropped to the floor (figuratively).

The colonel seemed just as lost at the unexpected statement and, while still slightly on guard, let out a disbelieving murmur: "Snu-snu...?"

Even the soldiers—not understanding Japanese—seemed to have realized something was odd. They were glancing at their commanding officer, Colonel Walser, with puzzled expressions.

"...Seriously," Kyouhei spoke, the first to come to his senses. He had gotten more or less used to his now-sister's bizarre behavior. "You idiot! Now's not the time! Run!"

The colonel's target was Pamil, so her just walking on in was perfect for him.

But...

"She just said 'I love you,'" Pamil started, approaching even closer as if she couldn't hear him, "and then you took her home straight away to start copulating—how shameless!"

"Wha?! N-No, that's—" Kyouhei stuttered, shaking his head.

Next to him, however... was a rapidly reddening Sanae who just said: "If... you wanted to, Senpai," inviting all kinds of assumptions.

"Besides, I told you that first! I've been waiting ten yea—" Pamil protested, then stopped. "...Ten years?" She seemed unsure of her own words and halted, crossing her arms and tilting her head in thought. "Ten years... Ten years ago. I only met you this year, though. Hmm?"

"You moron! Forget all that and run! I don't care where, just—"

His frantic cries weren't getting through to his crazy sister in the slightest, though, and she interrupted him saying: "Hmph, you're just saying that so you can have snu-snu with Sanae, aren't you?!"

"How the hell would I manage that like this?! Just look around!" Kyouhei shouted, almost in tears.

Then, finally...

"Hmm?" she asked, finally realizing that the two were tied up and that they

were all surrounded by guns. “Kyouhei...”

“So you finally get it.”

Though it was far too late. The soldiers had recovered and now had their guns pointed at them all. Obviously, being tied up, they had no way of escaping, and now nor did Pamil with over ten automatic rifles pointed her way.

“I...” Pamil began, frowning at Kyouhei as he drooped in exhaustion. “You’re into snu-snu while being tied up?!”

“Like hell I am!!” he roared.

“Princess Pamil,” Colonel Walser cut over Kyouhei, “it has been some time.” He gave a bow, speaking obsequiously to an unpleasant degree.

Pamil blinked suddenly and looked at him, then turned a questioning look to Kyouhei. “Is he a friend of yours?”

“Would you get a clue already?!”

“You do not recall me? Well, the hypnotic techniques did indeed create another personality in you,” Walser said, showing no sign of noticing Pamil playing the funny man. In fact, he had a faint smile on his face. “Your recollection of me is a trifling matter. However, if you lack your memories, that is indeed a concern.”

“Hm? It is?” Pamil asked curiously, clearly not understanding any of the situation.

“Indeed. We have not made our way all this distance to the far East simply to assassinate you,” Walser said particularly pompously. Pamil just blinked curiously again as he talked to her. Unsurprisingly, she didn’t see the soldiers around her as enemies. “The cabinet wishes to inherit the Legacy managed by the Bergmann royal family,” the Manninger colonel said with a cynical smile. “There are two main reasons you Savors have ruled the country for over a millennium. The first is the powers you hold. The other is what was bequeathed unto you by your ancestors, the Legacy.” He bent down to meet her gaze. “We combed through the remnants of the palace, but found nothing that could be the Legacy, so it must have been taken by you out of the country, no?”

“Hmm?”

Pamil, however, didn't seem to have any idea at all. She just looked curiously at him. Though if Walser was correct and a temporary personality had been created in her mind, keeping her memories sealed, then she would of course not know.

“...I don't get the fine details,” Pamil finally answered, “but you're essentially taking Kyouhei and Sanae hostage to demand something of me?”

“I'm pleased you are so quick on the uptake,” he responded, a sarcasm-filled smile on his lips. “And while we're discussing it, that goes for you too.”

He snapped his fingers, prompting red dots to cover her entire body. The dots were from the laser sights, silently proclaiming that a bullet was aimed at that location—a particularly effective threat.

“I have heard tales of the absurd powers of the royal family, but are they enough to repel hypersonic bullets from all directions, I wonder,” the colonel said, gleefully.

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In the end, Pamil was bound much like the others. Unlike the other normal humans, however, who were bound with thin nylon rope, Pamil had three pairs of cuffs on both her arms and legs, and constantly had five guns pointed her way.

Even if her ever-absurd royal powers could tear through the cuffs, three pairs would take longer. Then, even if she could get free and avoid the bullets, if she wasn't careful, then they could hit the other two hostages.

“I was informed that one or two pairs were not sufficient,” the colonel said. “These are specially made of maraging steel.”

Maraging steel was a specific alloy that increased the hardness and tensile strength of the metal. It was an exceedingly expensive material that was ordinarily used for aeronautics, missiles, and satellites.

Of course, Pamil wasn't enthused by that, and her big blue eyes were glaring at the colonel.

“Now, let us discuss the location of the Legacy,” he began.

“I don’t know about it. I’m not Princess Pamil; I’m her body double android,” Pamil insisted.

“You are just under that impression, no?” he said with a laugh. “Well... your current personality wouldn’t know that. There’s even a high possibility that torture wouldn’t yield an answer. You could call it a type of split personality. It certainly isn’t a bad method for maintaining secrecy; you can’t reveal what you don’t know, after all.” Pamil remained silent. “And so there is nothing more that I can do but have you looked at by specialists. I suppose I shall take you all to my country. Of course, I have not prepared official tickets, so it may be a little bit of a rough journey.”

“Wait a minute!” Kyouhei yelled, “Murata-san has nothing to do with this!”

“She certainly does,” the colonel answered with a thin smile. “She is Princess Pamil’s friend. A single hostage makes me uneasy. If you have two, then you still have insurance even if the one dies.”

“You bastard...”

The man was telling them that, should it be necessary, he’d kill one of them as a demonstration.

“If you can remember it here, then there won’t be a need to go through all this trouble, will there?” the colonel insisted.

“I told you, I don’t remember anything like that!”

“...Well, preparing the ship for our departure will take three hours. I do hope you’ll be able to remember before then.” So saying, the colonel strode outside.

Of course, the observers were still there watching them. There were silenced assault rifles pointed at the three of them, one a piece for Kyouhei and Sanae, and five for Pamil.

“Hrm... he wouldn’t listen.”

“Hey, Pamil,” Kyouhei called to her, regardless of the surveillance. They’d probably overlook a conversation at least. Although there might have been another soldier who understood Japanese. “So... you actually were a real

princess?”

“You’re getting in on it too?” asked Pamil in shock. “I’m Princess Pamil’s body double android.”

She wasn’t just playing dumb; she really did think of herself that way.

But...

“...You said ‘ten years ago’ earlier.” Kyouhei would have been seven, and still being dragged across the world by his father. The overall impression of his memories from back then was a whirlwind of chaos, so he didn’t have any firm recollections, but... “I remembered. I’ve actually visited the Bergmann Kingdom once, when I was seven.”

“Hmm?”

“I met a girl there, in a courtyard in a massive castle. She had the same hair and eye colors as you.”

“...Kyouhei, what are you trying to s—”

“If I think about it, it’s nothing weird,” Kyouhei spoke over Pamil’s slightly shaken voice. “Dad did say that his cousin married into the Bergmann family; that’s how he got his own connections there. Therefore, it’s not so strange to think that I’ve been in the royal palace if he took me along.”

It was a long-distant memory. A huge castle stood behind Kyouhei and the little girl he was playing with. That young, doll-like girl certainly had told Kyouhei that she loved him.

“I...” Pamil began before blinking and stopping. Traces of her original personality were probably coming back together with her memories. “I’m, um...” Her confidence seemed to have suddenly vanished as she turned timidly to Kyouhei. “I’m not... your sister?” she asked.

“Well, I guess you are,” he answered with a reluctant smile. It was falsified, but legally speaking, they were siblings. However... “Now, though... I guess you’re also my childhood friend,” he declared.

“Your childhood friend...” she murmured, rolling the strange words over her tongue. Though looking at her, he wasn’t sure if she really understood their

meaning.

“...Ah, well...” he said with a sigh, “that doesn’t matter right now.”

“It doesn’t?”

“Yeah.” Upon further consideration, if she regained her memories right here and now, things might get more complicated. “The thing we need to worry about now is how to get out of this. Actually, Pamil, do you really not have a clue about that Legacy he’s after?”

“Nope,” she nodded, confident for some reason, “not at all.”

Kyouhei made a thoughtful noise. That meant that all three of them would be taken to the Manninger Commonwealth.

Kyouhei didn’t know how big a thing the Legacy was to them, but from what had been said, there was no chance of him exchanging it for Pamil and Sanae’s life. It galled him to follow the man’s whim, but even so, he wouldn’t have minded negotiating the knowledge for their release.

With Pamil not remembering the knowledge in question, though, it was fruitless. Actually... even if she did have an idea, would it matter...? Even if Pamil did remember about the Legacy, she had literally been without a stitch on her when she’d emerged from the coffin, so... it was unlikely she’d brought the Legacy with her.

Of course, they couldn’t hand over the Legacy itself here and now. The one possibility was to provide information; to tell the Colonel where it was. At that point, the colonel would need to confirm the veracity of the information. It was unlikely that Kyouhei and Sanae would be released as hostages, to say nothing of Pamil—the three of them would be taken to the Manninger Commonwealth.

That would be their end.

They probably wouldn’t be killed until Colonel Walser had his hands on the Legacy, but there was also no guarantee they would be unharmed. And once it was discovered, they would doubtless have ‘fulfilled their purpose’ and been disposed of.

Pamil and I might be... but Murata-san really has nothing to do with it. She

shouldn't be wrapped up in things like this... Kyouhei thought, chewing his lip.

"By the way, Kyouhei?" Pamil suddenly addressed him.

"What?"

"Have you... not had snu-snu with Sanae yet?"

"N-Now's really not the time—" Kyouhei began yelling before he felt a hard blow to the back of his head. He turned around and saw the source. One of the soldiers had prodded him with the barrel of his gun to get him to quiet down.

"...Where'd you even get that idea from?" Kyouhei asked, more quietly this time.

"Because Shuuhei said so."

"That damn idiot!"

"He told me that when a Japanese boy and girl get along, they start copulating."

"We're not that animalistic. Besides, even if that was—"

He was about to say that it had nothing to do with his little sister, but just as those words were about to leave his mouth, Kyouhei's brain stopped.

His childhood friend and first love was probably the girl lacking common sense right in front of him.

But that Pamil and this Pamil are different... aren't they?

The current Pamil was a different person than the Pamil Kyouhei had met when he was young. At the very least, she'd always claimed to be a different person (android?).

However...

"Besides, I told you that first! I've been waiting ten yea—"

Pamil's words from earlier passed through his mind.

Ten years ago... Are her memories returning?

Things were complicated.

If she was a completely different person, then he could still make the distinction. However, if she simply had the same personality but some of her memories were altered, then both Pamils would be the same.

Personalities were built on memories, though. Therefore, if part of those were missing, the whole of the individual would be broken, and you could pretty much consider them different people...

“...Now ain’t the time to be worrying about that crap...” he muttered to himself before facing Pamil. “Pamil.”

“What?”

“You love me?”

“Of course I do,” she answered immediately, seemingly shocked he felt the need to even ask.

He felt Sanae gasp at his side. Well, she’d already confessed her feelings to him, so this certainly wouldn’t be calming.



But...

“No, I mean,” Kyouhei began, scratching his cheek. She was a foreigner to begin with, so she might not mean quite the same with ‘love’ as he did. He hardly thought she’d have held the same feelings for ten whole years. “Not a familial love. You know, the one where you’d... want snu-snu. Do you get what you’re saying?”

Pamil blinked. Then said: “You don’t want it too?” Her expression was completely pure as she said that, just like the little girl who had told him she loved him all those years ago in the big white courtyard.

Kyouhei was lost for words. Finally, he let out a: “Let me think about it...”

Even while thinking it was pathetic considering the situation, that was the only answer Kyouhei could give.

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“It is time for us to depart,” Walser proclaimed three hours later as he returned with ten or so soldiers at his back.

There was a large truck with its trailer open in the loading bay. If they were forced aboard the truck like this, then no one would see them, and they would be taken to the Manninger Commonwealth.

Damn it, the hell are you doing, Dad?! Kyouhei thought, his father apparently not having noticed any abnormality.

“Stand,” they were ordered, encouraged by the guns.

They couldn’t just sit quietly and wait for Shuuhei—if they didn’t manage something now, all hope would be lost.

I’d rather get shot.

If Kyouhei was to act up now, he’d have to fight in melee range. And in that case, there was a chance that Pamil or Sanae could be shot as well as him.

But...

If we’re taken, we’ll be killed before long... Obviously I will be, but Murata-san will be too. Pamil probably won’t be until she gives up the information... but

that's just a matter of time...

He'd use himself as a human shield and protect them as much as he could. If they still got shot, then there was nothing more he could have done—he had no other ideas.

Dammit, this is why I wanted a peaceful life! I hate this crap, he thought, firming his resolve.

The colonel was likely to do his utmost to avoid Pamil's death until he had his information, so there should be a chance for Kyouhei to exploit.

He was silent for a while longer, thinking. His target should have been the pistols the soldiers had. They were holding their rifles, and they were on slings over their shoulders, so they would be hard to take.

He looked towards a nearby soldier's waist and—

"Kyouhei-kun?" came a sudden voice.

It was utterly incongruous; it was just that sudden. A person had wandered in nonchalantly through the still-open loading bay. Kyouhei, focusing on the perfect moment to surge forwards, staggered.

The man who had just entered was paying no mind to Kyouhei's or the soldiers' situation as he continued quietly. "Sorry," he said, "we're out of soy sauce, can I borrow some?"

The man was standing there in a shirt and loose shorts: the stereotypical lazy-dad's-day-off wear. The person in question was...

"Hm? Father?" Pamil said.

Indeed, he was Pamil's father, Dolph.

Now that he thought about it, yes, Pamil's family was living in the next-door warehouse until they could find jobs. They were usually all out job hunting, so Kyouhei didn't really think of them as neighbors, but...

The most shocked were the colonel and his subordinates. "Y-Your Highness?!" the colonel groaned. At the same time, the laser dots on Pamil began to waver along with their wielders. "You... You're alive...?!"

“Hm?” Dolph noised, tilting his head. It was now that he finally noticed that the situation in the Nanbu household was not normal. Like father, like daughter—the airheads were just like each other, in bad ways as well. And then... “Do you have any soy sauce I can borrow?”

“Onee-sama!” came a cheerful yell as the queen and second princess, as well as all their relatives, showed up. The entire family appeared one after another. There were ten of them.

From Kyouhei’s position, he couldn’t see Colonel Walser’s face, but from what he could see of the man’s back, he could tell that he was exceedingly shaken.

Apparently, despite all his knowledge about Pamil, he was unaware of the other royals who had come to live next to them mere days ago. Or perhaps he was aware, but had only focused on Pamil.

“W-W-Why...?” the colonel asked pitifully. It was only to be expected—someone he thought dead had just turned up out of nowhere. More than one person actually. From the colonel’s perspective, it must have felt like the ground was falling away under his feet.

And...

“Ahh?!” cried the second princess, Lorie, her eagle eyes spotting Pamil’s situation. “Onee-sama?! Why are you wearing handcuffs?! Are you thrill-seeking?!”

“Hmm?” Dolph said, looking at Kyouhei, then Pamil, and then Sanae before speaking. “Kyouhei-kun.” There was a long pause. “I asked you to care for my daughter, but as her father, I think that it’s rather early for those kinds of activities while you’re still in your teens.”

“Are you lot stupid?!” Kyouhei demanded. They were all always in full flow.

Walser finally regained his bearing at that point, and pointed to the three with a scream. “D-Don’t move, I’ve got hos—”

“Royal Beeeeaaaaaaaaammmmm!” Lorie, however, wasn’t inclined to listen, and shot her beam right at their feet, causing a sudden explosion.

“Draagghhhh?!”

The three of them were sent flying through the air.

“You’re awful, Onii-sama! I was sure you weren’t such a pervert!”

Kyouhei yelled as he rolled.

In the next moment, his hands were grabbed by a pale hand.

“Indeed, it was a real help,” Pamil said.

In the moment of the explosion, she’d either ripped off her shackles or obliterated them with the Royal Beam.

And...

That single moment had seen the Nanbu home turned into a scene of utter pandemonium as the Bergmann royals used beams and all sorts of powers.

“Royal Beam!”

“Royal Barrier!”

“Royal Tornado Arrow!”

“Royal Straight Flush!”

And so on.

The soldiers returned fire sporadically, but it was chaotic, so they couldn’t really hit the family. Actually, the family only had to see their target to fire off a beam, whereas the soldiers had to recognize a target, aim, and then pull the trigger, so there was a distinct difference in response speed between the two groups.

“S-Stop it!” Walser screamed over the gunfire and explosions. “Stop it, we’re in the middle of a crime!”

The uproar would be sure to draw the officials’ attention. As if to underscore his sense of fear, a warbling siren, familiar to any Japanese resident, became audible.

“Impossible! It’s far too soon!” the colonel exclaimed.

It was indeed. An explosion or the like would certainly be reported to the nearest police station, but a car coming around in less than a minute was

unthinkable—even Kyouhei was dubious.

“Yo, Kyouhei!” another person cheered, prancing through the explosions and bullets.

“Mizuhito?!”

“How dare you start climbing the stairs of adulthood before your best friend?!”

“The hell are you on?! And what the hell’s going on?!”

“Going on?” asked Mizuhito.

Behind him was a battered up Mercedes with screams of “You little shit!” issuing forth from it and a police car on its tail.

“Ah!” he nodded with a bright smile. “We kinda made a mess for that gangster car on the way. He got angry and chased us, then the police car joined in. Maaan, this is the best☆”

“Do you wanna die?!”

Mizuhito broke out into a full belly laugh.

He should have been shaking in fear, but then again, he was the idiot rumored to be willing to sell his heart to stand out.

That being said, it was actually rather convenient for them. The colonel and his men were in the midst of an illegal operation, and so they would loathe the attention—particularly being arrested by the country’s officials. Therefore, if the police car arrived, they’d have to retre—

“Dammit...!” the colonel yelled as he ran outside. “Just kill all the witnesses!”

“Wai—” Kyouhei began in shock.

He hadn’t thought Walser would go that far. One or two people going missing was one thing, but every witness would include those police officers, and that wasn’t something that could be easily glossed over. How much value did he place on the Legacy then?

“...Wait,” Kyouhei murmured, looking around. “Even if he gives the order...”

Already ten or so of the soldiers were out of the fight due to the Royal Beams

and other attacks. The beams didn't actually kill, but each of them had taken an explosion at point-blank range, so their limbs were at odd angles as they writhed on the floor. They couldn't even move, let alone fight.

In that case...

"How then?" Kyouhei asked himself.

There probably weren't even ten soldiers left standing. Even they were being overcome by the absurd powers of the royal family, more of them falling with every passing moment. Maybe he had a reserve force somewhere...

Walser had rushed into the truck in the warehouse. Perhaps there was some weapon there that he could use to annihilate them.

"Crap!" Kyouhei cursed.

Whatever the case, the colonel clearly had more than the 20 fully-armed soldiers.

Kyouhei rushed after him, and before his eyes...

Boom!

The cargo area of the truck exploded.

"A self-destruct?!" Kyouhei said instinctively.

But, no. The panels around the cargo bay had fallen away as the explosive bolts detonated. The metal plates fell to the floor with loud clangs as white smoke billowed around the vehicle.

And then...

A metallic clicking and whirring started up within the smoke, sounding like the whine of an electric motor.

"No way!" Kyouhei breathed as it appeared.

A steel pillar burst through the smoke. It had a black tip, coated in some kind of black rubber as it took a step, thudding into the ground.

That's right, a *step*.

“For real?!” Kyouhei yelled. Mizuhito was next to him making happy noises and cries, but forget about that.

The metal body appeared from the smoke. It was supported by three pairs of enormous legs, each of which was about an armful wide. In other words, it was a...

“A robot...?” Kyouhei muttered instinctively, but it was more of a walking armored combat vehicle, or perhaps a multiped tank would be a better name.

Those three pairs of legs supported a flat body, almost like an arrowhead. It was as if someone had just attached legs to a stealth bomber—a bizarre mix of insect and aircraft. It was probably flat to lower the area to shoot at directly from the front. There were holes here and there along its body—probably missile tubes, gun ports, and the like. It was indeed completely bizarre, but there was no doubt it was a military weapon.

There were sectors where the Bergmann Kingdom was even more advanced than America or Japan. Kyouhei had heard that, so it wasn’t much of a surprise that the Manninger Commonwealth had inherited those strengths as well. This would be the product of that technology then. It was certainly more realistic than androids.

“That bastard...!” Kyouhei cursed.

He must have brought that along just in case the guns had not been enough. In other words, they were just that wary of Pamil’s strength.

“Ohh... that must be the Valkyrie, the walking combat vehicle that the military was developing,” Dolph explained in wonder from Kyouhei’s side. “I’d heard it was still in testing, but...”



He narrowed his eyes before continuing: “It’s a state secret, and this is hardly the best place for it. Operating it at a single soldier’s discretion in a sovereign nation like Japan is beyond reckless.”

No sooner had he finished speaking than beams lanced from his eyes.

But...

With a bizarre ringing noise, they bent.

The *beams*, that is.

Even Dolph’s eyes went wide in surprise.

“This is our latest weapon! We brought it as a guarantee against Princess Pamil. Did you really think we wouldn’t have taken precautions against your powers?!” came a triumphant voice. It was probably the colonel speaking from within the Valkyrie. “It has a room-temperature superconducting system that creates a powerful electromagnetic barrier. Beams, fire, plasma, and of course, physical objects like normal ammunition cannot hit it!”

As he spoke, the Valkyrie changed direction, its nose pointing towards Dolph and the others. With a noise of sliding metal, it opened...

“And there’s this...!!” the colonel yelled.

Dolph leaped to the side, and Kyouhei grabbed Pamil and Sanae’s hands as he followed suit. A huge bullet had soundlessly impacted the asphalt where they had been standing moments ago.

“Wha?!”

“A railgun, huh?” muttered Pamil.

The lack of sound fit. A normal gun accelerated its round from the explosion of gunpowder, but a railgun used an electromagnetic field to do so, so there was no sound from the explosion. And in theory it was possible to raise its power without limit. A single switch could change its initial velocity, simultaneously changing the range and force the projectile had. Kyouhei hadn’t heard of any military being able to miniaturize it enough to fit on a tank, or putting one into actual use, though.

Boom!

The railgun continued firing, punching through the engines of the Mercedes and police car. They didn't go up in flames like they would in movies, but both cars came to a halt with holes in their engines and chassis. Kyouhei could see the gangster and officer hurriedly getting out of their cars.

Then...

"I didn't want to use this; it's far too blatant," the colonel's tone was a touch more relaxed, likely because of the overwhelming weapon he now had. "There's no avoiding it. Once I've killed all the witnesses, I'll take you. We'll just call it a gas explosion or something. It'll take some money to cover up, but—"

"No you won't," Pamil said, stepping out.

"Pamil?! Hey—"

It was a reckless act. The weapon was immune to the Royal Beam and such; it had essentially been made to combat the absurd powers the royal family held. If they went head-on, it would certainly be Pamil who came off worse. Of course, Walser wanted the information about the Legacy that Pamil had, but there were many of the royal family here now, so he could well consider killing her an acceptable outcome.

"Stop!" Kyouhei yelled, running in front of her.

Then, there was a heavy thud.

It had come from the side of the Valkyrie.

"W-What?!"

The construction was listing heavily as well.

If the colonel was correct, the electromagnetic barrier would stop even a direct hit from a tank, but...

"W-What? What?! What on earth?!" Walser demanded in dismay.

Then, as if to cover the yell:

Thud!

This time it was completely visible—a black mass charging the Valkyrie head-on. It was stopped momentarily by the barrier, but soon broke through before rising once more.

It had no wings.

No propeller.

No jets.

Yet still, the black shape flew through the air.

“Whaaa?!” Kyouhei murmured dazedly.

Sanae’s eyes were wide too.

Everyone was looking at it.

“Rejoice,” Pamil said, sounding like a completely different person to the one Kyouhei knew, “this is what you wanted.”

Thud!

As she spoke, the thing slammed into the Valkyrie again. The supposedly invincible weapon’s armor warped and staggered.

“What the hell...?!” the colonel cried.

“You called it ‘the Legacy,’” Pamil proclaimed haughtily as the object came flying down from the sky to float next to her.

“I-It’s that?!” Kyouhei exclaimed astonished.

The thing floating in front of him... was the coffin that Pamil had been inside.

Chapter 6 - A Third Option

It was a strange scene.

If you asked him what about it was strange, Kyouhei Nanbu wouldn't be sure how to explain it. The people involved obviously were, but there was even more that was completely beyond his reckoning, so he was at a loss.

They were in a corner of the familiar warehouse district.

There was a burning police car and a burning luxury car.

There were also scattered soldiers wearing urban camouflage, groaning on the ground.

Well, that was fine.

All that was well and good—not in the sense of them being good events, but that they were at least things which the everyday person on the street could conceptualize.

However...

“What the hell...” Kyouhei murmured.

There were two bizarre things with that as their backdrop. Two things leaving behind normality at supersonic speeds.

The one was a lustrous black thing. It belonged to Colonel Walser, the instigator of this mess, and was apparently the latest model of tank. It was a bizarre machine, looking like someone had taken the flat fuselage of a stealth bomber and attached thick legs to it. Despite its appearance, it was by no means ill-suited for combat. The two cars had been destroyed in a single shot apiece by the Valkyrie's railgun.

And...

“...T-That's it?” The object Walser was asking about from within the Valkyrie was the other *thing*.

It was also a black mass like the tank, but far smaller.

It was a coffin.

Actually, it might have been some different machine, but it had the same size and proportions as a coffin.

...And it was floating.

That was no metaphor, and it wasn't supported by wires either; it was just floating in the air. It was, logically speaking, a sight that would cause the viewer to doubt their sanity.

"Indeed, this is it," proclaimed an adorable blonde-haired, blue-eyed girl as she folded her arms triumphantly. She was standing next to the coffin. Both her long hair and tawny school skirt were fluttering in the wind as she continued: "Colonel Walser, this is the Legacy of the Bergmanns that you, along with your masters, desire so richly."

"Ah... I... but...?!" the man protested, his confusion apparent over the speakers.

"Well, it's a part of it at least," the girl—Kyouhei's childhood friend and, legally, his sister, as well as the former first princess of the Bergmann Kingdom, and (you get the picture)—Pamil Terrill Karl Bergmann, said. "Regardless," she continued, a light ablaze in her eyes as she watched the Valkyrie, "though you people of the new revolutionary government needed to take extraordinary measures to stand against the members of the Bergmann royal family... I shall not allow you to drag my brother and friend into your violence!" No sooner had her yell finished than the coffin went flying. "You must be given a suitable punishment!" she cried out.

The coffin slid through the air and approached the Valkyrie. Of course, the Valkyrie responded in kind: the railgun fired off, emitting quiet sounds that belied its power, the rounds driving into the coffin.

But...

"Wha...?!"

Each of them had ricocheted off in the instant before they hit the coffin, as if

they had hit some invisible wall. They all went in the same direction too, into the ground, seemingly to avoid collateral victims.

It was an unthinkable sight. Thick armor rebuffing bullets was at least logical, but all of the bullets stopping and being reflected in a seemingly-controlled fashion was...

Moreover...

Crash!

The coffin hit the Valkyrie in some sort of super-advanced and yet primitive way. The latest walking combat vehicle staggered back and forth, but apparently it had superb balancers, as it merely faltered and avoided falling.

However... part of the thick black carapace had been crushed like it was an aluminum can.

“...Nwah?!” Walser cried in anguish.

The coffin drew a graceful arc as it returned to Pamil, like a trained falcon in falconry.

“D... D-Damn you...”

“Hm? Damn ukuleles?”

“Damn you...!” Walser cried, ignoring the ill-timed silliness from Pamil. “Fine... if you want it that way! I’ll just kill you and take it! The thing’s right there; I don’t need you royals anymore!”

Simultaneous with Walser’s proclamation, parts all over the Valkyrie began to open, and small missile launchers and high-caliber railguns appeared from the openings. They gave the appearance of a brutally destructive machine, but...

“Hmph, you still don’t understand. That thing stands no chance of winning against the Part,” Pamil said with a disgusted expression.

“A part...?” Kyouhei muttered. The coffin flying through the air was already beyond science, but if that was a ‘part,’ then... “No way.”

“Indeed, your thoughts are correct,” said Dolph Bergmann from his side.

The man was Pamil’s father and the former king of the Bergmann Kingdom. His bearded face held all the majesty expected of a ruler, but his clothing from the neck down, consisting of a shirt and loose shorts, ruined the whole impression.

Well, regardless.

“Hmph... this is it, then,” Dolph sighed. “It has strong defenses, but weaker offense. It wasn’t a weapon to begin with. All of them together would be better to avoid excessive casualties.”

After a moment... the roof of the warehouse next-door—the warehouse next to the Nanbu household—was blown off. In other words, the warehouse Dolph and the rest of his family were using as a temporary home.

Then...

“...Huh?” Walser let out mindlessly from inside the Valkyrie.

Something was visible in the sky, above the roof.

That ‘something’ was a flock of coffins.

Indeed, the ones that Dolph and the rest of the Bergmann family had been in when they appeared on the shore.

“No... you... I?” Kyouhei couldn’t help but feel a little sorry for Walser as he heard the dismay in his voice.

Kyouhei hadn’t the faintest idea that things would turn out like this. In fact, it was because of Pamil’s lack of common sense that he could still calm down in this situation. Normally, seeing a flock of coffins flying through the sky would be enough to derail your train of thought.

“Ohh?! Wow!” Mizuhito exclaimed from next to him. Well, the super-pervert could certainly be removed from that ‘normal’ category.

“Oh, Father, you’re helping?!”

“I don’t want this noise and nuisance to go on for too long. I’m handing control over to you, so deal with this quickly,” Dolph answered Pamil as she

smiled happily.

“Right!” she affirmed with a vigorous nod.

The flock gathered above her head. The one floating next to her joined in, and the ten coffins swirled together, almost like migratory fish in a fish tank. The rotational velocity shot up. Each coffin left an after image, and those afterimages merged with each other until...

“Wha...?!” Kyouhei let out dully, reminded of the fairy tale of the tigers running in circles around a tree until they melted into ghee.

At this point, he realized. The coffins had stuck together, becoming one. Actually, they hadn’t simply stuck together; some more unusual phenomena must have occurred... They had formed something far bigger than ten—or even twenty—of the coffins combined would.

It was fifty meters wide. It was a huge disc, floating in the sky. The center bulged out, giving it a galactic shape, like Andromeda. Said shape brought to mind the stars, but Kyouhei knew a simpler way to describe it: “A... A flying saucer...?!”

An unidentified flying object.

Or a UFO for short...!



“...Then that means...” Kyouhei managed, turning to Dolph with an expression somewhere between shock and horror.

The former king scratched his cheek somewhat bashfully. “Indeed, though I wonder what it’s called nowadays,” he said.

“No, nowadays and what’s in fashion isn’t...” Kyouhei trailed off.

“You’re thinking right. Our ancestors came from there,” Dolph said with a shrug, pointing up at the skies above, and probably at the void above the clouds.



Long, long ago, and even longer still, the country was struck by calamity.

An epidemic and famine. The two events happening at the same time were probably no coincidence. A famine killed in great numbers, and with few enough people there weren’t enough hands to carry out burials, let alone funerals. Therefore, unmourned corpses lay everywhere, a hotbed for disease, which then spread throughout the country.

People died in droves—the country was on the verge of ruin. Everyone thought so, and the fields of microbiology, product management, and hygiene weren’t developed in those days... There was no way to stop the epidemic, and no way to stop the famine.

But then, one day, they arrived.

They washed ashore from ‘an empty black sea,’ and were strange individuals... In exchange for being allowed to live in the country, they healed people, cut down forests to create fields, and used a technique called ‘cloning’ to increase the amount of livestock. Just like that, the country escaped its fate in a mere year.

Rejoicing, and as a sign of gratitude, the people gave the strangers from the ‘empty black sea’ the title of Bergmann, made them royalty, and asked them to forever govern the country.

Eventually, the country gained the name of its king and became known as the Bergmann Kingdom.

And they all lived happily ever after.



“...Wha?!” Kyouhei let out at the old tale from Dolph. “Y-You’re aliens?!”

“Well, you can use *E.T.*’s ‘foreigners,’ or you can be more poetic and call us ‘visitors’ as well,” Dolph joked. “That’s what we are,” he continued, pointing up at the floating disc, “and that is the ‘ship’ that our ancestors used to arrive here. The rare materials needed for the main engine are exhausted, though, so it can’t fly in space anymore.”

His explanation was careless, like it was just an old car in some warehouse. The people from NASA or JAXA would faint on the spot.

“This is the truth of the Legacy of the Bergmann family, and the Secret of Bergmann. It’s an assembly of general-purpose nanomachines; they can become many things simply by rearranging them with the control software. The parts of the Legacy are usually split between each person, but when they’re joined together, that’s what happens.”

“...Then, the country’s scientific advancements...” Kyouhei said leadingly.

“Stem from that, yes. Our ancestors used its powers carelessly, so neighboring countries set their sights on us, and there was war. Since then, the royal family has taken responsibility for it, and it has been our country’s highest secret... Well, the parts have a genetic lock too, so only we can use them.”

Kyouhei had no words anymore.

Mizuhito and Sanae Murata murmured, impressed.

“Oh, so Pamil-chan’s an alien,” was Mizuhito’s contribution.

“She’s not a psychic, then...” was Sanae’s.

“...Hey, show a bit more surprise, would you?!” Kyouhei yelled, turning to look at them.

They’d thought she was a body double android, but she was an alien.

A fake fake.

It was crazy.

“Well, you know, she did start by firing beams from her eyes,” Mizuhito defended.

Kyouhei had tried to keep it hidden, but apparently it hadn’t worked.

Well, moving on.

“I-Impossible!” Walser roared hoarsely. “That’s completely absurd!”

He’d finally snapped, and started firing all the Valkyrie’s weapons with an anguished yell.

The missiles and railgun rounds made it seem almost as if the vehicle itself had exploded, as they flooded towards the flying saucer.

“Wha...?!” Kyouhei exclaimed, paling.

The firepower on display would obliterate a battleship, sending it to the depths, to say nothing of what it would do to a tank. The coffin had stopped the rapid-fire railgun, but this was a far more powerful attack.

Of course, Kyouhei had no real attachment to the flying saucer that had appeared from nowhere, but it was a different matter when he considered a stray round hitting the girl standing triumphantly underneath it with her arms crossed.

“Pamil!” he yelled out.

But...

“*Verteidigung!*” Pamil proclaimed, causing the saucer to move rapidly.

The 50-meter circle floated in front of her like a shield, its glossy black surface stopping all of the attacks. There was something like a force field catching all the explosions and rounds and sending them into the ground below, blowing them away. It was a scene hard to even describe, primitive and super-advanced at the same time.

And then:

“Huge! *Ausschnitt!*” Pamil shouted.

Kyouhei wanted to yell about that first half not matching languages, but then the saucer started spinning like a massive buzz saw in front of him.

“What the...?!” Walser yelled dazedly at the primitive attack method (and probably the too-direct naming of it) as the disc slipped 90° with deceptive ease for its size, rolling along the ground like a bowling ball headed for the pins.

With a roar, it impacted into the Valkyrie and then passed through.

Which meant...

“Ah... Ahhhhhhhh...!!” came Walser’s scream, not over the speakers, but directly from him.

The latest walking combat vehicle had been split down the middle and was now open and exposing its insides. The colonel and a soldier who looked like his co-pilot were panicking at the opening before falling out. Then, a moment later, the secret weapon of the Manninger Commonwealth burst into flames.

“Impossible... It cannot beeeee!” Walser screamed, beating the ground with his fists. The shock must have been too much for him.

As Kyouhei watched the elite soldier reduced to acting like a kindergartener, he had an urge to go and pat him on the shoulder.

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Well, that’s how it went.

Colonel Walser and his crew—the unlawful special forces squad—were all arrested by the police who turned up after the commotion.

Of course, firepower-wise the soldiers were stronger, being equipped with automatic rifles and such, but... they’d all been beaten within an inch of their lives by Pamil and her family, so they were unable to really resist.

Once the flying saucer was done, it was quickly turned back into coffins and hidden inside the warehouse, so they weren’t seized by the police.

Fortunately, the officer and gangster from the cars chasing Mizuhito and Pamil had escaped with just minor scratches... Considering the scale of the conflict, it was practically a miracle that there were no casualties.

And so, it was case closed.

At least nearly; the remainder was happening around Kyouhei.

“...Um,” he muttered.

They were in a corner of the Nanbu household, now mostly restored to its usual state. The area had a table, sofa, and the like, as if it were a TV setup. Kyouhei was sitting in the area with a troubled look on his face.

At his right sat Pamil.

At his left sat Sanae.

The two were looking at each other, but...

“Let’s call it a night for now,” Sanae suggested.

“Right, let’s. Sanae and I are going to talk for a while, so you go ahead, Kyouhei,” added Pamil.

“This is my house,” Kyouhei protested, looking in Sanae’s direction.

His usually timid and reserved schoolmate... was glaring at Pamil. Like she was looking at her husband’s mistress who had walked in while the wife was out.

“Sanae-chan...” Kyouhei said.

“I... I’m okay...” Sanae answered in a faint voice which sounded not at all okay.

The situation was in complete shambles; there was no other way to easily describe it. Pamil and Sanae were friends... but this mess with Kyouhei had them at odds.

Originally, Pamil had had false memories implanted in her consciousness to keep the secret of the Legacy safe, so she had thought she was a body double android, and couldn’t remember meeting Kyouhei before at all.

Thanks to the earlier chaos, though, she had recovered her memories, along with the memory of her promise to marry Kyouhei when she grew up.

“It was a promise, so I want to see it fulfilled,” Pamil told him.

“We were kids; we weren’t thinking seriously about that kinda stuff! It was just a bit of fun!”

Pamil stared steadily at him, a rather unhappy expression on her face. “That’s awful, Kyouhei. I’ve never forgotten that promise... not for a single day...”

“Pamil-chan...” Sanae said, for some reason moved to tears by her rival’s words.

“You definitely *did* forget until today!” Kyouhei countered.

“Mgh... I-I can’t deny that, but it was beyond my control.”

“Well, it was...” Kyouhei admitted. A princess would have to put her own feelings aside for the good of her country, and to maintain its secrets. “Anyway, you’re a princess, right?”

“I am.”

“You can’t date a commoner like me, can you?”

“...A commoner?” asked Pamil in puzzlement. After a period of thought, she continued with a clap of realization. “Oh, you don’t need to worry about that; you’re not a commoner after all.”

“Huh?”

“Dad, Shuuhei Nanbu, was entitled for his services in the expansion of the Bergmann Kingdom’s economy. It was just a formality, so there wasn’t any land gifted to him, but he’s still a viscount.”

“...Dad’s... a noble?”

Well, his cousin had been able to marry into the royal family despite being a foreign commoner. And Shuuhei had used his international connections for the country’s benefit, including removing Pamil’s ‘coffin’ from the country. If he was so well trusted by them, then it was no wonder that he had been given a title.

“So you don’t need to worry. We can even get married,” Pamil declared.

“No! No no no, that’s not wha—”

“Besides, it’s rather old-fashioned of you to say that royals cannot marry commoners. Indeed, you are truly a son of Japan, with all its tradition and mysteries,” Pamil said easily.

“Wait just a minute, we’re already talking about marriage?!”

“It was a promise.”

“I mean... isn’t it too soon?!”

“It’s been ten years.”

“That’s not what I meant!” Kyouhei yelled. “If we jump into talking about marriage, then it’s not fair on Murata-sa—I mean, Sanae-chan.”

A Japanese high school girl nowadays wouldn’t start thinking about marriage straight after her confession. That was what Kyouhei thought at least...

“It... it’s okay... Senpai,” Sanae nodded with a pale face as she clutched her strawman. She didn’t look ‘okay’ at all to Kyouhei. “I can... get married... too!” She was speaking like she was volunteering to be a sacrifice to some evil spirit. Of course, she wasn’t seeing marrying Kyouhei on the same level as being sacrificed, but it required just that much determination for the shy, reserved girl to go through with it. “I can... can c-c-consummate it... t-t-too! I read about the art of lovemaking in *An Encyclopedia of the Magic of the World...*!”

“Wha... Wait wait wait! Sanae-chan, don’t get dragged down with Pamil. Stay calm!” Kyouhei implored.

There was a real issue immediately connecting marriage, consummation, and the art of lovemaking.

“I’m c-c-c-c-c-c-calm...!”

“You definitely don’t look like it!”

“He’s right. Calm down, Sanae.”

“Maybe you should be a little less calm?!” he questioned.

Who knew what was going on now.

“...Anyway, Kyouhei,” Pamil said, suddenly re-seating herself properly, “you’re talking about all this like it’s got nothing to do with you, but what are your feelings?”

“Ugh...” Kyouhei gulped, lost for words.

He had indeed been making quips like it was someone else’s problem to avoid the situation, but she’d already noticed it...

“Kyouhei, do you hate me?” Pamil asked.

“Why are there only ever two options...?” Kyouhei murmured as Pamil looked

up shyly at him.

He obviously didn't hate her, but that couldn't automatically mean that he loved her; it would be a huge issue. After all, until yesterday, she'd just been his sister.

I've never looked at her like that...

Ten seconds passed as he thought back.

...Sorry, I have, lots of times.

If they had been brought up together, then that would be one thing, but it was hard to consider her a proper 'sister' when they'd just suddenly started living together. Her figure was amazing, and she certainly was cute, so there was no doubt she'd grow into a real beauty. The android fantasies had yanked on Kyouhei's emergency stop, but that wasn't an issue now...

...Surely the craziness and her being an alien are just as bad, though?! Kyouhei thought, honest enough to pick out the flaws in his own feelings. I want to live normally... he concluded, as ever.

Being told to settle down when he was still just in high school worried him.

But...

"When I grow up, I'll marry you, Kyou-niisama!"

He could still remember a young Pamil telling him that with an innocent smile on her face, not even half a day after they met. When he thought about that girl being Pamil, he certainly did want to hold her tight.

That was the truth.

In that case—

"...Senpai," Sanae spoke timidly, pulling Kyouhei from his reminiscence.
"Senpai... do you... hate me...?"

Another set of two options.

Kyouhei despaired internally.

He didn't hate her, of course. She had a few oddities, such as her love for curses and magic... but she was fundamentally a diligent, cute girl. She might be a lot plainer than Pamil, but she was pretty, and a slight smile on her face truly drew you in.

Until the other day, though, she had just been Kyouhei's schoolmate; he wasn't ready for any of this. Having a relationship was one thing, but suddenly bringing up marriage made him recoil.

If he had to choose between love or hate for both of them, then he'd pick love. If he had to choose whether he found them attractive or not, then he'd respond positively as well.

But—

"Hahahahaha!" came a loud, irresponsible laugh from above Kyouhei as he worried. He looked up in surprise. "Hyah!"

A figure leaped from the catwalk above like in some kind of hero show. The black cape on their back fluttered through the air as they dropped, spinning wonderfully through the air to stop in front of them.

"If you prop up one, you can't the other! If you do the other, you can't Mothra!" the figure proclaimed.

"And why would I want to prop up a nuclear *kaiju*?"

"I have a wonderful solution for you as you grapple with that contra—"

Kyouhei stared at the person with eyes colder than a just-frozen goldfish in liquid nitrogen as he said: "So, what's with the outfit?"

It consisted of a black mask with animalistic ears and a wetsuit-type affair with embedded muscles, making him look more macho.

"Huh? You've not seen *The Dark Knight* yet?"

"That ain't the problem! Anyway, where have you been wandering around until now, you moron dad?!" Kyouhei demanded, pointing at his father, dressed up as an American hero.

"The Corvette," Shuuhei answered. "Did something happen?"

“You’re damn right it did, lots of stuff! There was this weird military guy, a tank, and a flying saucer.”

“Kyouhei...” Shuuhei said, putting a hand on each of his shoulders in surprise, “have you been reading so much manga that you can’t tell what’s real and what’s fiction?”

“No!”

“Light novels then?!”

“No!!” Kyouhei yelled, stamping his feet.

“Now now, we’ll talk about the little stuff later,” Shuuhei said, looking at him in amusement.

“That could have been a diplomatic incident; you can’t call it little stuff!”

“This is a diplomatic incident too,” Shuuhei answered, pointing at Pamil and Sanae, of course. “On the one side, we have Yamato Nadeshiko + Eccentric + Brave Schoolmate + Glasses Girl—a plain but friendly girl,” he declared, gesturing with his left hand towards Sanae, before gesturing with his right towards Pamil. “And on the other, Blonde hair, Blue eyes + also Eccentric + Little Sister + Alien + Childhood friend + Princess with an orthodox beauty!” Shuuhei then clenched his fists and declared: “Whichever one you choose is the ultimate selection!”

“...You shouldn’t be speaking like that about someone else’s daughter, Dad.”

“Don’t be rude; I was praising them,” Shuuhei proclaimed excessively proudly, nodding repeatedly with his hands on Kyouhei’s shoulders. “I know how you feel, I do. Your old man has found himself in this dilemma many times...”

“You should have learned your lesson the first time! And don’t lump me in with you!”

In Shuuhei’s case, it was doubtlessly just two-timing. Or three, four, or even five-timing—such was the terrifying truth of the self-proclaimed International Trader.

That was why Kyouhei still didn’t know who his mother was.

“But, Kyouhei,” Shuuhei continued, utterly ignoring the censure from his son,

“you’re lost because you’re always considering the future. If you look at the bigger picture, you’ll see things you hadn’t until now!”

“I mean, you’re completely right, but hearing it from you annoys me.”

“Haha, praise from my son! You’ll make me blush.”

“It ain’t praise!” Kyouhei yelled with a right straight, which was warded off by Shuuhei’s black-gloved hand. “...So,” he continued, putting more strength behind his fist as he glared at his father, “what are you actually trying to say? If you don’t actually have a clue, then I’ll be really pissed off.”

“Oh, so these are the wild teenage years I’ve heard so much about.”

“You’re in your forties and going wild—stuff it!”

“How rude. I’m still barely in my thirties,” Shuuhei answered. “Well, whatever. I know just how to break the deadlock. It’s a brilliant plan! Listen to your papa!”

Kyouhei narrowed his eyes and glared.

And then...

• • •

There was a building towering in the twilight. It stood, lording over its surroundings. It jutted suddenly out of the streets which were still like in the middle ages, practically destroying the harmony with its surroundings, arrogantly and vaingloriously.

The new building was a symbol of the rights of the new government, having taken a huge sum of the national budget while the economy was still unstable. It drew much criticism from the citizens, but the people sequestering themselves away there weren’t concerned with that.

After centuries of effort, they had finally gained—no, *regained* in their own words—ownership of that political might. And with that at their backs, they were busy, regardless of finally tasting victory.

It was the Prime Minister of the Manninger Commonwealth’s official residence.

People who had good sense or intelligence, however, called it ‘the Fortress’ due to it being almost exclusively inhabited by soldiers. The politicians had all taken their money and fled when they had heard the palace had fallen, or else they had been imprisoned.

“How boorish,” murmured an old man as he gazed at that Fortress.

Both his long hair and the beard covering his mouth were white, and his clothes were the same. Behind his glasses, his eyes shone with a light a hair’s breadth from madness.

The man was standing on the roof of a house a mere three buildings from the residence.

“There is not even a shred of grace to it. They may have needed a huge building to symbolize their rule in place of the palace, but they rushed too much; there are gaps everywhere. It isn’t even airtight, so the fluid calculations were absurd.”

If anyone associated with the palace had been present, they would have surely been shocked. The old man was the head scientific adviser who had reported directly to the king. He was thought to have perished alongside the king, with no body left behind.

“Good work,” he said to the soldiers wearing urban camouflage behind him.

They were each holding handgun-looking objects, but they were boxy for some reason, with yellow tape wrapped around them and the word ‘TASER’ written on them. They were non-lethal stun guns.

“A bloodless revolution is now possible,” a soldier remarked.

“Revolution?” the old man asked with a high-pitched chuckle belying his unpleasant thoughts. “What revolution? Those people playing at being a government in that shack are by no means our rulers. They’re simply doing as they please while the king is absent. It’s more bloodless enforcement than revolution.”

“Precisely,” nodded a soldier.

Then...

“The gas should have spread,” the advisor said. “Unless they’ve stopped breathing and died, they should all be asleep. Go teach those arrogant youngsters a lesson.”

“...Sir.” the soldiers answered, donning gas masks and running to infiltrate the residence.

● ● ●

Kyouhei Nanbu. A seventeen-year-old high school student.

He loved the ordinary. You could also call it normalcy.

Regardless, he lived his life by the tenets of ‘not standing out,’ ‘not being abnormal,’ and ‘not drawing attention.’ It could be called an obsession of his. He took care of his clothes and behavior so that he was always part of the general average as he lived his life.

And yet...

“...What the hell is this?” he groaned.

He was sitting—or had been seated—on a chair. An exquisite, decorated, and expensive chair.

All of the furniture in the room was expensive, even the carpet, lights, and window frames too. All of them screamed that they cost a lot of money—even Kyouhei could tell, and he was certainly not used to luxury.

But it wasn’t just the furniture; Kyouhei’s clothes were the same. He was wearing a custom-tailored tailcoat. Normally, he never wore clothes like these, so it felt like he was cosplaying. But what with it being custom-tailored, it fit and suited him perfectly.

“What’s what?” asked Pamil, also wearing an expensive-looking set of clothing, a white dress that almost seemed like a wedding dress. “Haven’t you heard from Shuuhei?”

“...I’ve not heard anything.”

He’d been bundled into a plane completely at a loss and dropped off in the Manninger Commonwealth, or rather, the New Bergmann Kingdom.

Indeed, the Bergmann Kingdom had returned.

The Manninger Commonwealth had been forced into being with the defeat of the royal family. All of their policies were failures, and with the economic troubles they had caused, they had lost the support of the people and collapsed in a single year. The soldiers didn't understand politics and had tried to force a regressive military regime, but that had been a mistake.

As a result, those who longed for the Bergmann Dynasty had sheltered the royal faction, and a few days ago, had carried out a strategic operation to remove the military's parliament by the roots. The revolution had been overthrown without harming the establishment, territory, or citizens, and Bergmann rule had been reestablished.

By the time Kyouhei had been essentially kidnapped and landed there, even the signs welcoming people at the airport read 'Welcome to the Bergmann Kingdom.'

Now...

"We're announcing you to the citizens," Pamil told him.

"...Huh?"

"As my fiancé."

"What?! That's really sud—" Kyouhei began before clamping up.

She was once more looking almost fearfully up at him.

Yes, fearfully.

Fearful of being denied by someone she had yearned for since she was young.

However...

"Pamil," he said with a sigh, "you're not fair. You've just sprung it on me when it's pretty much done. And if you look at me like that, I..."

...can't refuse.

"Yup, because you're kind," nodded Pamil with a smile. "And... so there are no misunderstandings, this was Shuuhei's plan, okay?"

"...The moron," Kyouhei said with a frown. "What about this is breaking the

deadlock? This isn't a solution at all."

It was just picking Pamil and abandoning Sanae.

"Hmm? You don't want to do it?"

"...It's more that I don't think it's fair to Sanae-chan."

"Hmm," Pamil frowned at his words as she folded her arms before continuing apologetically: "It really isn't fair for her to be the second wife...? I definitely was the one to confess first, though, so impartially—"

"...Hold on a minute," Kyouhei protested, raising a hand. "Did you really just say something so weird so calmly?"

"Hm? The second wife thing?" she asked without any pretense. "I won't give up being the first wife, though; I asked first!"

And right at that moment...

"Princess, Madam Sanae is ready," came a voice through the door, accompanied by a knock.

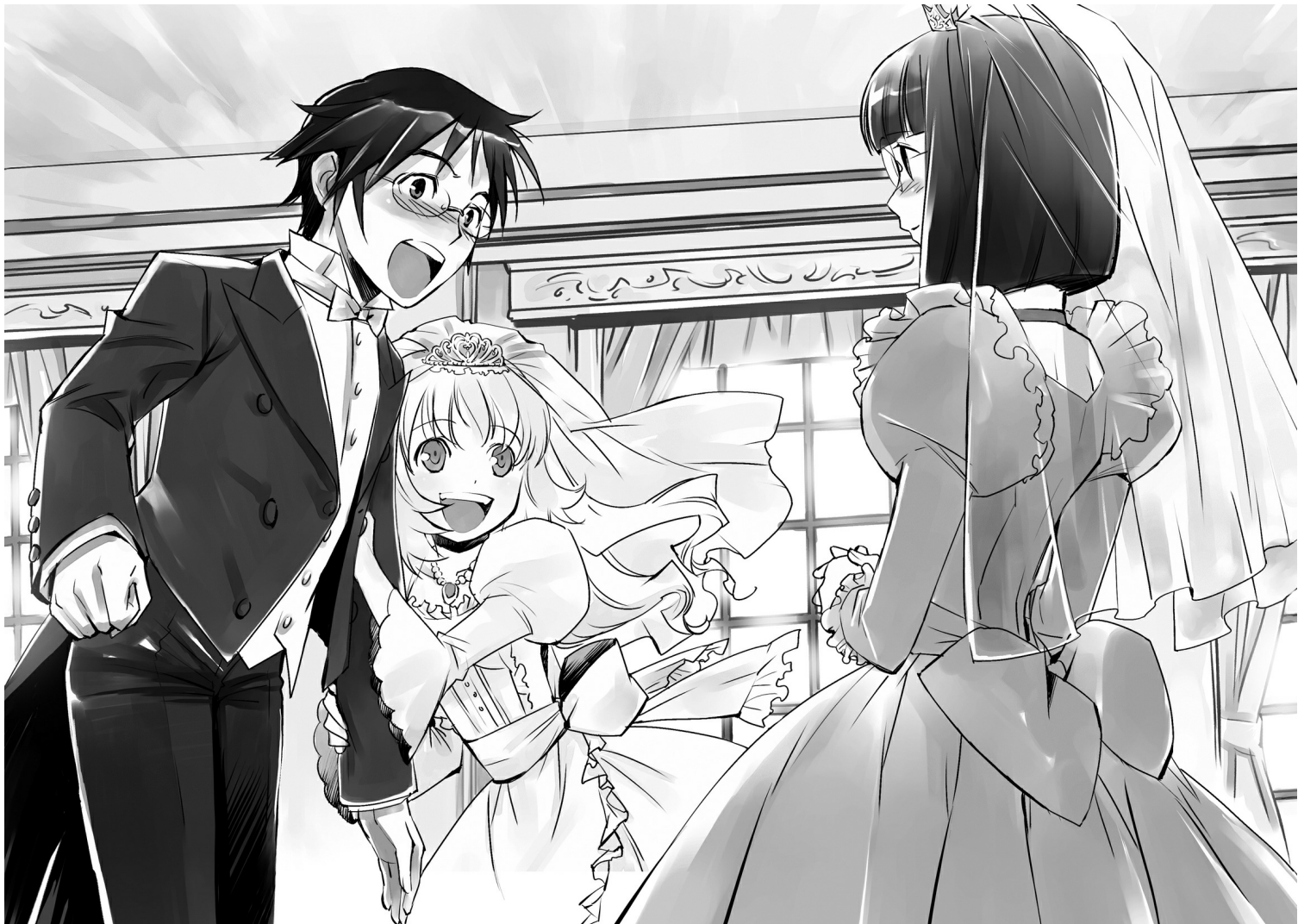
Pamil gave the order for them to enter, and...

"S-Sanae-chan?!" Kyouhei sputtered in shock.

Sanae Murata stood there wearing a blue dress. There was a woman in a maid uniform next to her, but she soon vanished.

"S-Senpai..." she managed in confusion, evidently also having been essentially kidnapped. She then ran over to him and clung to him. "W-What's happening?"

"Like I said," Pamil declared, grabbing Kyouhei's other arm and clinging to him as well, "I'm the first wife, and Sanae's the second."



“...Isn’t that bigamy?!” Kyouhei demanded.

“Under Bergmann laws, a royal can marry up to three people.” Pamil’s tone was triumphant.

The law had probably been drawn up to prevent the rare bloodline of the royals from dying out.

“So that’s what Dad meant...” To become part of the royal family and then marry them both. “That’s crazy, you old man!” Kyouhei yelled angrily. “Pamil, Sanae-chan, this is—”

“I don’t think it’s crazy at all,” Pamil said easily. “I love you, but I also want to help Sanae be as happy as she can be.”

So she didn’t have any objections to Kyouhei and Sanae marrying; she was just fussy about the order.

“Pamil-chan...” Sanae murmured in confusion.

“But, are you... Are you okay with that, Sanae-chan?” Kyouhei asked.

“...I... I,” Sanae said, clearer than usual despite her downcast gaze, “I want Pamil-chan... to be happy too... so... i-if you’re okay with it... Senpai...”

Kyouhei looked up to the ceiling and let out a sigh.

The girls, who would ordinarily be most against such an idea, were happy with it, so he was the only one being the fool.

“I...”

That was right: Kyouhei Nanbu did indeed love normalcy.

But not...

“Not so much that I’d reject the two girls I love, huh?”

“Hm?”

“Senpai?”

Kyouhei shrugged at the questioning girls.

“Right, I’m a man; I’m ready for it.”

“Senpai...”

“That’s our Kyouhei.”

Sanae was looking at him through teary eyes, and Pamil was nodding in satisfaction.

Pamil then walked over to the door as she said: “Let’s go then, Kyouhei! We need to announce our engagement. The media and neighboring ambassadors are coming too, so it needs to be a speech fit for a king!”

Apparently, it was going to be a rather extravagant affair.

It weighed heavily on the high school student, who, until yesterday, had wished for nothing more than normalcy.

But...

“...Are you sure it’s not too soon?” he asked with a slight smile, taking Pamil’s hand, which she stretched out towards him.

Side Story - Afterward. A Redundant Redundancy

Kyouhei Nanbu lived by the precepts of normalcy and blending in.

Being part of the masses, not standing out, and leaving an impression that was utterly forgettable would be perfect for him. Nothing good came from standing out, nor from being unique.

It was, in many ways, the opposite of the stereotypical silliness of middle schoolers, and it was in this matured taste that he based himself on.

And yet...

“Yo, gold digger.”

“Back home again, future king?”

“Whoa, we got a winner here.”

“You staying here until graduation?”

...And so on.

He was currently in a situation that was the polar opposite of his creed.

The reason was simple.

Over the last month of ups and downs, he’d gotten together with—or rather gotten engaged with—both a self-proclaimed body double android who was legally his sister but was actually his childhood friend and a princess, and an eccentric and reserved glasses-girl schoolmate at once.

In Japan, there would be no way to avoid accusations of bigamy, but his one fiancée was a real princess, royalty. Such a person was indeed beyond laws, or more accurately, subject to different laws than the masses. Therefore, polygamy with a first and second wife was permitted.

Still, even if Kyouhei had resolved himself to that, he couldn’t just flip to nonchalantly being one of the royalty. He’d asked to at least be able to graduate properly and gotten an agreement, so he’d be living as any other high

school student in Japan for a year.

Actually, it was a two-year extension, roughly. That was to allow Kyouhei's graduation, but also Sanae's, who would be his second wife. There were of course outrageous suggestions about the country not minding a high-school-dropout royal, or that he should move right away, and they'd ignore even the university entry requirements.

Naturally, Kyouhei vetoed that. That was what he hated the most: people getting away with anything because they had influence.

Dolph had accepted his reasoning without even batting an eye, happily saying that he'd become a king that was in touch with the people.

Kyouhei had decided that he'd gradually ease into it over those two years.

But... he was naive.

Hopelessly naive.

He'd completely forgotten that he'd been at a press conference announcing his own engagement to the media. He'd just assumed that with the country being so far away, along with it being a tiny country barely in history or geography textbooks, the conference wouldn't be broadcast in Japan.

However, there was the matter of just what was being announced. The princess's fiancé was Japanese, and his second bride was also Japanese. There was no way that the Japanese media wouldn't leap at such a morsel of information.

What should have been a discreet return to Japan had somehow been leaked, and there were cameras and microphones surrounding them at the airport, bathing Kyouhei in their flashes. Just getting home had exhausted him. As for Sanae, she had returned to her own home as well for a while, but it seemed to be encircled by the media 24/7.

On the positive side, at least the whole situation did improve public order in the area, with molestations and pickpocketing on the outskirts suddenly hitting zero.

And now, back to the present.

Kyouhei had intended to just keep attending school as if nothing was wrong, but the second he entered the classroom, the calls from earlier started. He now had loads of not-particularly-pleasant nicknames, like being a “winner” or “gold digger,” and no one would call him by name anymore.

“What is this, some new type of bullying...?!” Kyouhei groaned, slumping over his desk.

Sanae had also returned to school and was most likely getting the same kind of bizarre attention. Pamil would probably be fine, but Sanae was fairly timid, so it may well be wearing on her. She was already looking exhausted on the way into school.

I'll check on her later, I guess... he thought to himself. *She is my fiancée after all.*

Kyouhei shuddered in embarrassment at the word going through his mind. It was far beyond boyfriend, girlfriend, or even lover—meaning bride-to-be. In English, you could even call her his betrothed...!

No, it was just too embarrassing. Just as embarrassing as it would be wearing a tuxedo with a rose in his mouth.

“Ughhh...” he groaned.

“What’s up, gold digger? Not feeling well?”

“Don’t call me that!” Kyouhei roared, rising from the desk.

His classmate looked at him in surprise.

Then, suddenly...

“...Actually,” Kyouhei said to himself, realizing that the idiot who’d started this wasn’t here.

Unlike his other classmates, he had been there during the mess with Colonel Walser, so he wouldn’t be surprised at Kyouhei’s position, though he didn’t actually have any such charm in his personality.

“...Where’s Mizuhito?” he asked.

“Huh? Hibiki?” his classmate said, as if wondering why he was even bothering

to ask. “He’s...”

As he spoke, the student pointed over his shoulder with his thumb at the end of the classroom. There, in the rear of the two entrances to the room, was Kyouhei’s friend, Mizuhito Hibiki.

There was no mistaking the redhead with the strange tattoo on his cheek—well, it was a fake one—who would have doubtless been swiftly told to withdraw if it wasn’t for his grades.

“...What’s with him?” Kyouhei asked.

“I mean, it’s Hibiki.”

“...Seriously, what’s he playing at?” he groaned.

Well, it was obvious.

Mizuhito... was hiding half behind the entrance.

To be more detailed, he was half on the other side of the wall, and was just leaning in with his torso. Putting it bluntly, you’d call it peeking from around something.

It was unnatural for him. What was unnatural was the fact that, unlike Kyouhei, he practically lived to stand out and almost instinctively sought out attention, so him hiding in the shadows was unheard of. It was even more unusual than the sun rising in the west.

And...

He was glaring steadily at Kyouhei from the shadows.

If he had a handkerchief, he’d surely be biting it.

“I thought you pair got on,” his classmate said.

“Well, yeah.”

“So maybe he’s jealous? Like, he thinks some woman is taking his Kyouhei away from him?”

“No way!” Kyouhei denied with an almost-yell. “Neither of us is like that!”

“You’re the only one who thinks that,” the other student said with a broad

grin. “Besides, I never thought you’d be getting it on with a princess hiding out and studying abroad either.”

So that’s how it seemed to the public.

Well, it wasn’t a bad guess.

“We’ve not gotten it on yet!”

Though there had been a few close calls before he’d come back to the country.

“You haven’t? Even though you were together for a year?”

“We just lived together!”

“Words sure are convenient, huh?”

“Shut it!”

Well, all that aside.

“...Mizuhito!” Kyouhei yelled to his hiding and glaring friend. “What are you doing?!”

He continued glaring for a while before entering the room and walking over to Kyouhei.

“What’s up with you? Why you gotta glare at me?” Kyouhei demanded.

Mizuhito continued wordlessly looking at him for a while, and finally responded: “Kyouhei... I... I... I misjudged you.”

“What are you on about?”

“You... You...” he started, before shouting the end of his sentence: “You stand out so damn much!”

Kyouhei stared silently.

“I... I still haven’t even gotten on public radio... but you! You are on the news! And worldwide at that! You’re always going on about not liking attention, and then... and then, without even telling me...!”

“...Phew, good, it’s still the same old you,” Kyouhei said in relief.

Essentially, Mizuhito was jealous—or envious, rather—of Kyouhei being on

TV, and wanted him to have let Mizuhito stand out at the same time.

“It’s not good! It’s not, Kyouhei! When did you get so attention-grabbing all on your own without letting me know?!” Mizuhito yelled as he beat at the desk.

Seeing his friend on the verge of tears from this didn’t make Kyouhei feel sorry for him, or apologetic, it just made him think he was acting like a child, but he decided to keep that under wraps.

“You’re a filthy adult since that snu-snu with Sanae-chan!”

“Wha—Hey, the hell, you pervert?!” Kyouhei yelled, grabbing him by the collar.

Apparently, Mizuhito was still under the same misunderstanding that Pamil had been under when the Colonel attacked—it was baseless and excessive.

Even if they really had crossed the line, publicizing it would be bad.

The classroom’s reaction was fairly normal.

“Sounds about right,” said one student.

“People wouldn’t get married without even having sex these days,” added another.

“Dammit, he’s beaten me,” came from yet another.

“Huh? Th-They wouldn’t?!” Kyouhei demanded in confusion at his classmates’ reactions.

He was still weak to things being called normal.

Well, he had been brought up abroad for many of his formative years, so there were still things in Japan that were seen as normal that he didn’t know about. He was fairly sure he was generally fine, but sometimes he was slightly off with his common sense.

“Yeah, it’s normal,” interjected a classmate watching their conversation.

“Usually, you live together before getting married to see how compatible you are and stuff. It’s weirder living together and not having that kind of relationship.”

“...Um. I lived with Pamil for a year and didn’t,” said Kyouhei.

A hush instantly filled the classroom.

Kyouhei froze at his classmates' gazes stabbing into him in the oddly unbearable quiet.

Then, a moment later...

"Liar!" they yelled simultaneously.

"We've got a liar here!"

"Someone get the truth serum!"

"Who'd trust a manwhore like you?!"

"It's definitely a shotgun wedding!"

All the criticism of his classmates pierced him like arrows.

"Quit making stuff up about people!" Kyouhei yelled, but he was outnumbered, and his protests were overwhelmed by his classmates' voices.

Among them was Mizuhito. "I misjudged you, Kyouhei! To think you'd lie for attention!" he shouted.

"Why are you joining in too?!" Kyouhei demanded, pointing at Mizuhito.

But...

"At this point..." Mizuhito began.

"...At this point?"

"I'll have sex with my girlfriend, climb the stairs of adulthood, and get on TV!" After he finished his shout, Mizuhito let out one of those cries that made bullies want to bully the bullied. He raced away, making the pitch change with the Doppler effect.

Although, as he tried to leave through the door, the electric guitar on his back got caught in the opening and slammed him back, but let's ignore that. Let us also ignore the fundamental problem of whether he could have sex with his girlfriend, get on TV, and so on.

Then...

"... 'Girlfriend'?" Kyouhei muttered with a frown.



“Humm, so that happened?” asked an adorable blonde-haired, blue-eyed girl while nodding.

She had milky-white skin, golden hair, and sapphire eyes, almost like she was the masterwork of some doll craftsman. There were no flaws in her appearance, and even when you stood by her, she was somehow otherworldly. She still fell under the adjective ‘cute’ now, but in a mere five years that would change to ‘beautiful.’

This was Pamil.

Since the reinstitution of the Bergmann Kingdom, she was a true princess, but her behavior was... Well, she was a sheltered princess, and a foreigner, so many of her words and actions were still odd from a Japanese perspective. At this point, Kyouhei would have been uneasy if she suddenly started acting completely differently.

“Mizuhito has a strange personality,” she said, folding her arms.

“And you can hardly talk,” Kyouhei retorted.

Incidentally, they had swiftly returned home after school had ended. This was, of course, a countermeasure against the media. If they tarried overlong, then cameras and microphones would descend upon them and things would get crazy. They would have liked to stop for a breather and a cup of tea, but gave up on that too as they reached the Corvette.

“I’ve always wondered...” spoke another cute girl from across the low table, sitting next to Pamil.

She wore glasses and a bob hairstyle, with a timid expression in her eyes. Those features were practically synonymous with being plain, but on close inspection, you could see that her eyes were wide and beautiful behind her glasses. Her features themselves were pretty, and she was fair-skinned.

She was Pamil’s classmate and Kyouhei’s second wife (to-be), Sanae.

The reason she was in the Nanbu household as well was that she couldn’t possibly relax at the Murata household. The media were surrounding the area

here as well, but the Nanbu household was a warehouse, so it had few windows and the like, meaning that there were fewer chances for someone to peek in. Coupled with the military-grade security, here she could at least relax somewhat.

Her parents, by the way, had long-since been talked to by Shuuhei and the Bergmann Kingdom's ambassador, so when she returned to Japan, they'd just asked her why she was still attending school from their home. Apparently, despite it only being an engagement at present, it felt like Kyouhei and Sanae were already married in her parent's eyes.

Well, that aside.

"...What's so good about standing out...?" Sanae asked uncomprehendingly. "If your name becomes known, you can be cursed more easily during the witching hour and such..."

"Sanae-chan, there are probably only ten people in Japan that worry about that," Kyouhei assured her. There probably weren't 12 at least, or so Kyouhei wanted to believe. "Oh, are you worried about that?"

"Ah, it's okay," she answered with a timid smile, "Nanbu-senp—" She stopped there, and shook her head vigorously. "I mean, Kyouhei-san. I made sure to prepare countercurses in case any of us is cursed...!"

Kyouhei sighed before answering. "R-Right."

Well, Pamil's oddity—being descended from aliens—was a thing, so he could hardly scoff at the occult.

"What I'm surprised at is that Mizuhito has a girlfriend," Kyouhei said with a tight smile. "It's not like Pamil said, but he's enough of a show-off that it could be considered a disease."

So if Mizuhito had a girlfriend, Kyouhei was sure he'd already know. The boy made it his life's work to draw attention, so it was hard to believe he'd date someone in secret.

"She's not imaginary, right?" he asked himself.

"Hm?" Pamil tilted her head.

“Like, you know, she’s invisible, and he’s sure she’s there... and that other people can’t see her.”

“Oh, right,” Pamil nodded, “like a girlfriend who can’t be seen by people who are stupid.”

“Are you trying to call me an idiot? Anyway, that’s not it.”

After all, Mizuhito would count as an idiot too.

However...

“Oh!” exclaimed Pamil, punching her hand. “Mizuhito said something about a girlfriend.”

“He did?”

“Indeed,” she affirmed with an exaggerated nod. “It was when you were having snu-snu with Sanae behind my back.”

“How long are you gonna keep that going?!”

“It was a joke,” she explained. “But back then, I’m sure Mizuhito mentioned trying to get snu-snu, and it not going well.”

“Oh?” Kyouhei said with a slight smile.

Well, Kyouhei had read that it often didn’t go well if both people were inexperienced. It was a bit amusing imagining Mizuhito being innocently worried about his first time not going right, though...

“He said something about suggesting doing it on top of a building and charging money to spectators, then getting slapped by her.”

“There’s nothing amusing about that!” Kyouhei roared.

That was Mizuhito, alright. If it would lead to standing out, all of his values were warped.

“Still,” Kyouhei said, folding his arms, “him having a girlfriend...”

What kind of girl would go out with him? He couldn’t imagine it at all.

Well, when you thought of a couple, it was easy to imagine people with the same type of personality, or maybe the exact opposite, with them admiring

something the other had that they didn't...

"...W-What?" Sanae asked, her cheeks darkening as Kyouhei stared at her.

When he thought of the opposite of Mizuhito, a person like Sanae came to mind. If Sanae had gone out with Mizuhito rather than Kyouhei, she'd probably pass out from the nerves, though. While she wasn't exactly like Kyouhei, she was shy and also hated standing out. Although she probably wouldn't be able to refuse Mizuhito's overwhelming demands.

"If she were like Pamil, they just wouldn't fit together..." he continued thoughtfully.

Even if they were the same type—both completely lacking common sense—he couldn't think of a way for them to get along in that sense.

"What do you mean?" Pamil asked.

"I was just wondering what kind of girl Mizuhito's girlfriend is. If she were like Sanae, then she'd get exhausted from not going along with him, and if she were like you... I kinda... can't imagine you dating him."

"You needn't worry, I shan't cheat on you with Mizuhito."

"I'm not worrying," Kyouhei protested with a faint smile. "I'm just wondering about what she's like."

"Huh?" Pamil tilted her head. "You're curious?"

"Hm, well, yeah." Mizuhito was his friend after all.

If Kyouhei was told to name one person as his best friend, then Mizuhito's would be the first name he'd give. He might be a moronic pervert, but he wasn't a bad person. He spoke readily with Kyouhei when he was worried about not knowing anyone in his class, and helped him fit into the group.

"Hmm... I'm somewhat interested too," Pamil said. "Our first time will be soon, so it should be useful to use other people's experiences as a reference."

"Ho—W-Wait, what are you even thinking?!"

"Obviously," she said proudly, "we'll watch Mizuhito and his girlfriend having snu-snu!"

“That’s not princess-like!” Kyouhei cried out in despair. “Anyway, it’s not like we could peep on people!”

After all, they were currently in a situation where they’d be under a watch of their own if they gave the media the slightest chance. Though he had a flower on each side with two fiancées, he couldn’t even give them a kiss if he felt like it, so of course they wouldn’t be able to investigate Mizuhito and his girlfriend.

...Or at least, they shouldn’t have been able to.

“It shall be an issue should you not be able to maintain your privacy!” came a grand voice. “The latest technology guards your secrets! Henceforth, you too—”

Wordlessly, Kyouhei fished around next to the table and then fired off a high-caliber pistol. With a sound somewhat quiet to be called a gunshot, the round flew from the barrel—trailing a cord behind it—and impacted one of the many boxes in the surrounding area, spraying sparks.

It was an anti-riot taser.

Then...

“You’re so extreme every time we meet,” spoke the voice again.

“And whose fault do you think that is?” Kyouhei demanded.

The voice belonged to a middle-aged man who had folded himself into an arrow to avoid the projectile.

Incidentally, he was currently wearing traditional casual clothing. If he had a scabbard and sword at his waist, then he’d have been right at home in a gangster film.

Kyouhei hated to admit his relationship to the man, but their similar features made it obvious. Kyouhei would probably look much the same once he reached his thirties.

Indeed, the man was a self-proclaimed International Trader and Kyouhei’s father, Shuuhei.

“Kyouhei, Hoshino-san’s not bad. You shouldn’t talk like that about them.”

“Who’s that?!”

“A board member of Hobby Japan.”

“They’re about as far apart as models and armadillos! It’s 100 percent your fault!” Kyouhei protested.

“Hmph, and your dad here brought such a wonderful item for you.”

“Besides, you... Wait, item?”

“Yup!” he chirped with a nod, taking something from the shadows next to him. “Dah dah dada! A disguise set!”

“What are you supposed to be, some robotic cat from the future? ...You were so over the top I thought it’d be some amazing machine, but a disguise set?” Kyouhei said, narrowing his eyes and looking at the box Shuuhei was holding.

“Like, glasses, a hat, and a wig?”

“Hahaha, nothing so gauche. It’s a quality product from the Bergmann Kingdom’s Science and Technology Agency, using the latest fake skin made possible through high polymer chemistry! It’s truly multi-purpose; it can even grow hair and sweat!” Kyouhei watched him warily. “It’ll never be seen through under normal circumstances. For example...”

With a rustling, he took a mask out of the box and put it on.

Then...

“Kyouhei-kun, you should listen to what your father says,” he said with the Corvette owner’s face, Kaoruko. It was indeed an amazing technology.

They weren’t even two meters apart, and Kyouhei couldn’t tell that it was a mask. The face looked just like Kaoruko’s, smiling nonchalantly at him. And that was for someone he was familiar with... If it were someone he didn’t know well, then they’d look like the real one.

“Shuuhei-san’s so amazing and clever... Whoa?!” exclaimed Kaoruko—no, Shuuhei—as he bent again to avoid the second projectile. “What are you doing?!”

“It’s creepy hearing your voice out of her face, so quit it,” Kyouhei said with a glare.

The face was certainly Kaoruko’s, but from the neck down he was still

Shuuhei, so it was as unsettling as seeing a horse's head attached to a cow's body.

"Anyway," Shuuhei said, lightly tugging the mask off, "if you go out with this, you can look like someone else and have the media chasing after you less..."

"...Is that why you have them?" asked Sanae while blinking.

Shuuhei laughed proudly. "Well, Kyouhei and Pamil aside, you must be getting pretty stressed."

"Father..." Sanae murmured, overcome with emotion.

"At any rate," Pamil said with a nod, "we can use these to tail Mizuhito."

"...Are we seriously doing this?" Kyouhei asked in annoyance.

"Kyouhei, are you not interested?" Pamil asked seriously. Kyouhei had no answer for her. He was interested, in several ways. "You are, I'm sure," she said, as if seeing through him. "What kind of fantas— person, is having snu-snu with Mizuhito?!"

"You've been a lot more illicit since you got your memories back, haven't you?"

"Hmm?" Pamil tilted her head in confusion.

Well, that aside...

"...I suppose I *am* interested..." he admitted, knowing it was in bad taste.

● ● ●

Mizuhito Hibiki.

He dedicated his life to standing out. That was no metaphor or the like; he'd not even hesitate to rush into a fire covered in gasoline if it would help him stand out. Incidentally, the reason he hadn't done so was that, if he died, he would have only stood out once in his whole life. In essence, he was the kind of man who would never feel at ease unless he was being watched.

However, there had been no rumors about him having a girlfriend. If he had one, then it would be fairly normal for her to be shame—to become common knowledge.

It was because of this that it was all so unnatural. This was why Kyouhei had used the suspicious disguise kit to witness Mizuhito and his girlfriend, because he was curious about the unnaturalness of the issue.

He wondered whether he was being taken advantage of.

That was it.

“I figured he’d be going straight to his girlfriend with how he was going on,” Kyouhei said.

It was a Sunday. Kyouhei, Pamil, and Sanae were all watching the Hibiki house whilst wearing their disguise masks. Kyouhei had phoned Mizuhito’s younger brother—whom he’d met on several occasions—and he had said that Mizuhito was going out that evening, and had told the family that he didn’t need any dinner.

It was already past noon, so it wasn’t abnormal for him to have already left if he was going on a date... but they still hadn’t seen him.

“Maybe he left through a tunnel?” Pamil suggested.

Indeed, she was the one who said it, but at a glance, no one would have thought that she was that Northern-European fairy. While there wasn’t much change in her features, her skin was now tanned, and her hair was in dreadlocks. Even her eyes were now dark.

“What kind of family other than a royal one has an escape tunnel?” Kyouhei demanded.

“The Nanbu house has one, though.”

“...Well, we’re not exactly normal either,” he answered.

Kyouhei, on the other hand, still had the same skin color, but also long hair and a strong-jawed face.

“But what if they have a back door or something and...” Sanae added.

She too had essentially the same features, but with longer hair. The mask also had ultra-thin and transparent lenses inside, so she wasn’t wearing her characteristic glasses.

“I’ve been to their house loads, so I know where that door is—it’s in the garage. Even if he used it, he’d still have to go past the front entrance,” Kyouhei told her.

Being Mizuhito’s friend, he’d visited to hang out on many occasions. Actually, that’s where Kyouhei learned a lot of his Japanese common sense.

You might think that because Mizuhito was as he was, his whole family would have a screw loose, but his parents and siblings were all normal people.

“Hmm...” murmured Pamil in thought. “Right, let’s use the Royal Searcher Eye to find him.”

Kyouhei wanted to protest that she should have done that from the start if she could... But he was always telling her to limit the usage of her absurd abilities, so he didn’t really have any right to complain.

“Then, I’ll do a divination...” Sanae added.

“Sanae-chan, that’s alright, leave the fire altar,” Kyouhei interjected, interrupting Sanae as she started to assemble a portable fire altar set she’d taken out of nowhere.

“Hm... Kyouhei, Mizuhito’s out,” Pamil said.

Kyouhei turned to look, and indeed, Mizuhito had appeared from the entrance.

But...

He frowned.

That was certainly Mizuhito. Seeing someone’s face wasn’t the only way to recognize them. The way they stood and moved was unique to a person. You could often recognize a close friend or relative from behind that way. Therefore, Kyouhei knew that this was Mizuhito.

However...

“What’s he playing at?”

He was sneaking out of the house and creeping along the shadows to avoid people’s gazes. Not only that—he lacked his usual fake tattoo, his red hair was

hidden by a beanie, and he didn't have his guitar.

Impossible.

Even though Kyouhei knew that it was indeed him, he could see that Mizuhito was completely missing his usual characteristic features.

Which meant... Mizuhito was abandoning his creed, his way of life, and avoiding people's gazes.

"...So," Kyouhei muttered, "it's not that we haven't noticed—he's hiding it."

Hiding his girlfriend, that is.

But if he was going that far to hide her...

"Maybe," Sanae suggested with a serious expression, "she's someone he can't talk about to people..."

"Someone he can't talk about?" Kyouhei repeated.

"Like, maybe he has one of *those* relationships... The easiest ones to understand are student and teacher, brother and sister, father and daughter—" Sanae said fearfully before Kyouhei interrupted her.

"Well, there's no way it's father and daughter..." he mused. Mizuhito did have a younger sister, but besides them not being like that, there'd be no need for him to leave the house like this. "Student and teacher... Well, it's possible at least."

"Maybe she's a married woman...!" Sanae said, but apparently the phrase 'married woman' had bones in it that made her try to shake it off. Apparently, she was well aware that she would be a married woman before long.

"Well, he might hesitate to get attention with someone that wouldn't be ethically excusable," he muttered.

But that would make things all the more complicated. An imaginary girlfriend was one thing—you could just give the person some advice and correct them—but if they were sneaking around like this, then often advice was rather unwelcomed. However ethically or morally dubious, people had their reasons and circumstances.

And...

Besides, I'm engaged to my legal sister, and declared that I'd be committing what Japanese law would call bigamy, he thought to himself. He didn't really have the right to critique other people's decisions.

Though that said...

"We should check it out."

Being in a relationship with someone morally or ethically dubious often started involving others for the worse. Kyouhei didn't want that for Mizuhito either, but particularly wanted to avoid his family getting hurt, so that was his decision, even knowing it would be unwelcomed.

"Right," said Pamil with a deep nod. "It could be useful to see some extremes."

"...Well, sure," he said, just letting her slightly-skewed opinion pass for now as they followed him.

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Mizuhito was walking around the town like a normal high school student. And about five meters behind him trailed the group.

Finally...

"Ah, welcoome."

The three stared in surprise.

As should be expected, Mizuhito had just entered the Corvette.

"I-I-It can't be! He's with Kaoruko-san?!" Kyouhei exclaimed in shock from behind a nearby telephone pole.

Kaoruko was someone that Kyouhei had held fleeting feelings for in the past, but their age difference and the lack of interest that Kaoruko herself had seemed to have in romance had naturally made those feelings wane.

Still, with the memories of those past emotions still relatively fresh in his mind, the thought of Mizuhito dating Kaoruko gave him conflicting feelings.

"Kyouhei, think logically. If they were dating, he wouldn't go into the café.

He'd pick a day when the Corvette was closed," Pamil told him.

"...Ugh, hearing you talk about logic is..."

Well, she was right, now that he considered it.

Dating the owner wasn't the only reason to enter a café. If anything, it was more natural to assume that that's where the date would be.

"Right, let's go in," he said.

Their disguises were perfect. After checking their appearance one more time in a pocket mirror, the group entered the Corvette.

"Welcoome," Kaoruko said with her usual easy-going and calming smile. Then, she blinked puzzledly at them before asking: "...Oh, did you feel like an image change?"

Kyouhei instantly raced over to the counter.

"W-W-W-W-What are you talking about?" he demanded.

"Eh, but the w—" she tried to protest.

"Ahahaha, the weather is nice today, isn't it?!" he laughed over her statement. It was rather blatant, but now wasn't the time to be worrying about that.

He glanced down the counter to see Mizuhito looking at what was happening, but soon losing interest and looking out of the window.

"What's wrong?" Kaoruko asked.

"Nothing at all," he said in a strained whisper. "You can tell who I am, though?"

"You're Kyouhei-kun, right?"

"How can you tell?"

"It's how you walk and stand."

Well, if close friends and family could tell who the other person was just watching them from behind, the same could well be true from the front, even if their features had changed.

"If you're not just changing your image, what are you doing?"

"Ahh... Well, we don't want Mizuhito to know we're here."

"You're tailing him?" she asked.

"More or less," he admitted.

"Oh, so you're at that age now."

"What age would that be?" he retorted.

"The age where you awaken to boys' love."

"I'll never reach that age," he insisted.

"Ehh?" she moaned in disappointment. "So you're not stalking Mizuhito-kun because you're interested?"

"The words are about right, but there's no romance behind it," he told her.

"So boring," she sing-songed.

"It's not!" he yelled, but still keeping his voice down, before continuing more normally: "Well, he was acting strange, so we got curious. I wondered whether he was going off the rails or getting taken advantage of."

"Ahh," Kaoruko said with a smile, "that's what it was. I think it's fine."

"...Kaoruko-san, do you know something?"

"Hmmm," she temporized, putting her index finger to her lips in thought. "I wasn't asked not to say anything... Right, I'll tell you later."

"Hahh," Kyouhei sighed.

"...Wait a minute," she said, going to the back and fetching a large box. "Mizuhito-kun, here."

"Ah, thanks," he said, standing and taking the box in his arms. He left behind 3,000 yen and immediately left.

"...What was that?" Kyouhei asked. He wasn't here to meet his girlfriend, or to meet Kaoruko, just to get that white box.

"A birthday cake."

“A birthday cake?!” he asked in shock before suddenly realizing. “Oh, it’s her birthday?!”

“And he’ll...!” Sanae started in agreement before Pamil spoke over them.

“Kyouhei! We need to hurry, or we’ll lose him!”

“Got it, on my way! Kaoruko-san, sorry for the disturbance!”

“Ah, Kyouhei-k—” she said, trying to get their attention, but they’d already left.

Therefore...

“...I think they’re misunderstanding it, but I guess it’ll be fine?”

They had no way of hearing Kaoruko’s murmur.

● ● ●

The three of them were frozen.

It was because of the completely unexpected scene before them.

“Mizuhito-niichan!” “Ah, it’s Mizuhito!” Came the bright and cheerful voices of young children.

There were five or six of them, of different ages, but all younger than ten. They were all thronging about him like he was their parent as well, grabbing at his hands and climbing up his back.

“Ah, Hibiki-san,” came a voice from two middle-aged women who had left the seemingly-ordinary house slightly after the kids. “Sorry, did you really do it?”

“I did. I promised after all,” he said as if he was a completely different person than usual.

Finally, he, the children, and the women entered the house.

“What...?” Kyouhei managed.

“Hmm, maybe,” Pamil posited, her arms folded, “those women are his wives, and the children are his!”

“Two wives isn’t...” Kyouhei started, about to say that two wives weren’t a thing that people had before he fell silent. “Anyway... those kids are too old to

be his.”

However much of a pervert Mizuhito was, he wouldn’t have had kids when he was about ten.

“...Maybe,” Sanae added her thoughts, “this... is a juvenile support institution...?”

“Juvenile support institution?” he asked. Though now that he thought about it, that was a word he’d heard often on the news recently.

“They used to be called orphanages,” Sanae explained.

Kyouhei whirled around to look at the house.

“But... it’s a normal home?” he asked for the others’ opinions.

“I’m sure it was just after the turn of the century... They established facilities called ‘group homes...’ A lot of people have narrow-minded views of the institutions, so they made them look like ordinary homes so they could integrate more easily into the community,” she told him.

“Hahh... so that’s what it is.”

“Indeed, it would appear Sanae is correct,” Pamil said, looking inside with her Royal Searcher Eye. “I can’t lip-read too well, but it looks like it’s one of the children’s birthday.”

Kyouhei fell silent.

So, Mizuhito volunteered... went out of his way to buy a cake for one of the orphans, and then came to deliver it?

“...Ugh,” he groaned, putting a hand and his head on a nearby wall like a regretful monkey.

“What’s wrong, Kyouhei?” Pamil asked.

“It’s just... I feel really dirty.”

The boy had not sought praise—and in fact had avoided notice—to buy a cake with (probably) his own money and bring it to the home. In fact, he’d probably dressed inconspicuously in keeping with the group home’s purpose to integrate more easily into the community.

How tawdry his concerns had been... When faced with his friend's actions, which could well be called noble, he felt terrible about himself.

"I'm the worst..." Kyouhei muttered.

"T-That's not true...!" Sanae tried to console him frantically.

But self-recrimination was not so easily abated once it came to the fore.

"Let's just go home..." he muttered, trudging off.

Sanae trotted alongside him, constantly trying to cheer him up.

Pamil looked repeatedly between the house and the other two before humming slightly and following them.



The birthday party in the home went on for a rather long time.

It was therefore past seven that evening before he gave his excuses to the women and children and left.

"Ah... I'm an hour late. She's probably gonna be mad," he muttered to himself.

"Obviously I will," came a voice from behind him as he checked his call history.

"Geh."

"What's with that reaction?" the girl asked, glaring at him as he hunched like a husband caught in an affair. "You were late, so I came to get you."

"Thanks," he answered with a pained smile.

She looked at him and then asked him a question in amazement. "I don't get it, though. Volunteering there... Doesn't it seem really different than your hobbies?"

"It's not, though?" he said without a hint of offense. "I get a lot of attention."

"Well, yeah," she admitted.

"Besides," he said with a grin. He looked like the final boss of a game telling someone his dastardly plan. "If I have this kind of past, then when I become

famous, it'll be like a 'hidden episode' and get me even more attention—it's a guarantee!"

"...Right," she said with a sigh.

She was staring at him like he'd ruined everything as he talked about his plans to accrue fame. Then, she said while shrugging: "I guess I'm the idiot for thinking you might actually just be a really nice guy."

"Hahaha, I *am* a nice guy, though."

"You'd just sell your soul to the devil for attention."

"Hahaha, you'll make me blush."

"It's not praise!" she shouted before stepping up to him and taking his hand. "Come on, we can still have dinner together, right?"

"That was my plan from the start," he said as the girl fell into step next to him.

The two of them walked through the streets bathed in the setting sun, hand in hand.

"Hey," he spoke.

"What?"

"How long do we have to hide this?"

"As long as we can!" the girl answered bluntly.

She was frowning, but there was a dusting of pink across her cheeks—that of a maiden in love.

"...Hmm."

"It'd be embarrassing if Sanae knew I am dating a show-off pervert like you."

"...So that's the problem?"

"It is."

"You've got a strange personality."

"I don't want to hear that from you!" the girl protested, chopping the back of his head.

“Then, for the time being, we’ll postpone the plan to get famous by doing it on top of a building and—”

“Postpone that plan forever!” the girl exclaimed, glaring at him, before she, Youko Minebe, let out a long sigh.



Afterword

Greetings, I am the light novelist, Sakaki.

And so this is how (if you want to know exactly how, it's in *Papua New Guinea*) *Fake Fake* has come to its final publication. The tale of the crazy robot girl (false advertising) that has been serialized for three years—first in *Novel Japan*, and then in *CharaNov!*—has come to an end.

Whenever I start a new series, I often establish the characters (and the setting) completely (and then also frequently get caught in my own trap), but I didn't do that outside of the basics with *Fake Fake*. I didn't decide on anything big like “the world is _____” or a “_____ that transcends time.” By some metrics, Pamil's identity is a big thing, but regardless, I kept things on street level. The plan was to gradually build up the world with the readers' intuition.

Well then, I wonder how it went.

Honestly, I think there might have been a problem with the meaning behind the title not becoming clear until the third volume. I thought of it because a great person once said that a title is a decoration (and so on), but well, maybe another title would have been better.

Like *Robot Sister's Moe Moe Diary*.

Or *Sister Princess (but Robotic)*.

Or *Fake/Robot Night*.

Or *My Little Sister Can't Be This Robotic*.

Maybe something like that would have been better (they wouldn't have been).

At any rate, as the author, I'm happy because I managed to finish the story. Though I got the number of episodes left wrong with the last three chapters, so I couldn't use my assistant and missed the schedule, then ended up in the hospital with lithiasis and missed the serialization, so a lot happened! (Haha) It's

fine—it's done now!

I'm sorry to everyone else involved (mainly the illustrator, Kaori Fujita, and my editor), though!

Well, now I'm done with my apologies.

I hope to meet with you readers once again in some other series.

Fake Fake Production Staff Ichiro Sakaki

Think! Hidaka (production management) Miki Sakamoto (Chapters 3-6)

4th February 2009

Ichiro Sakaki



Wild Times with a
Fake Fake
Princess
Alien Nation



"You'd go
that far to
have snu-snu
with Sanae,
Kyouhei?!"

"Damn you!
Why would
you go
so far?"



“When I grow up,
I’ll marry you,
Kyou-niisama!”









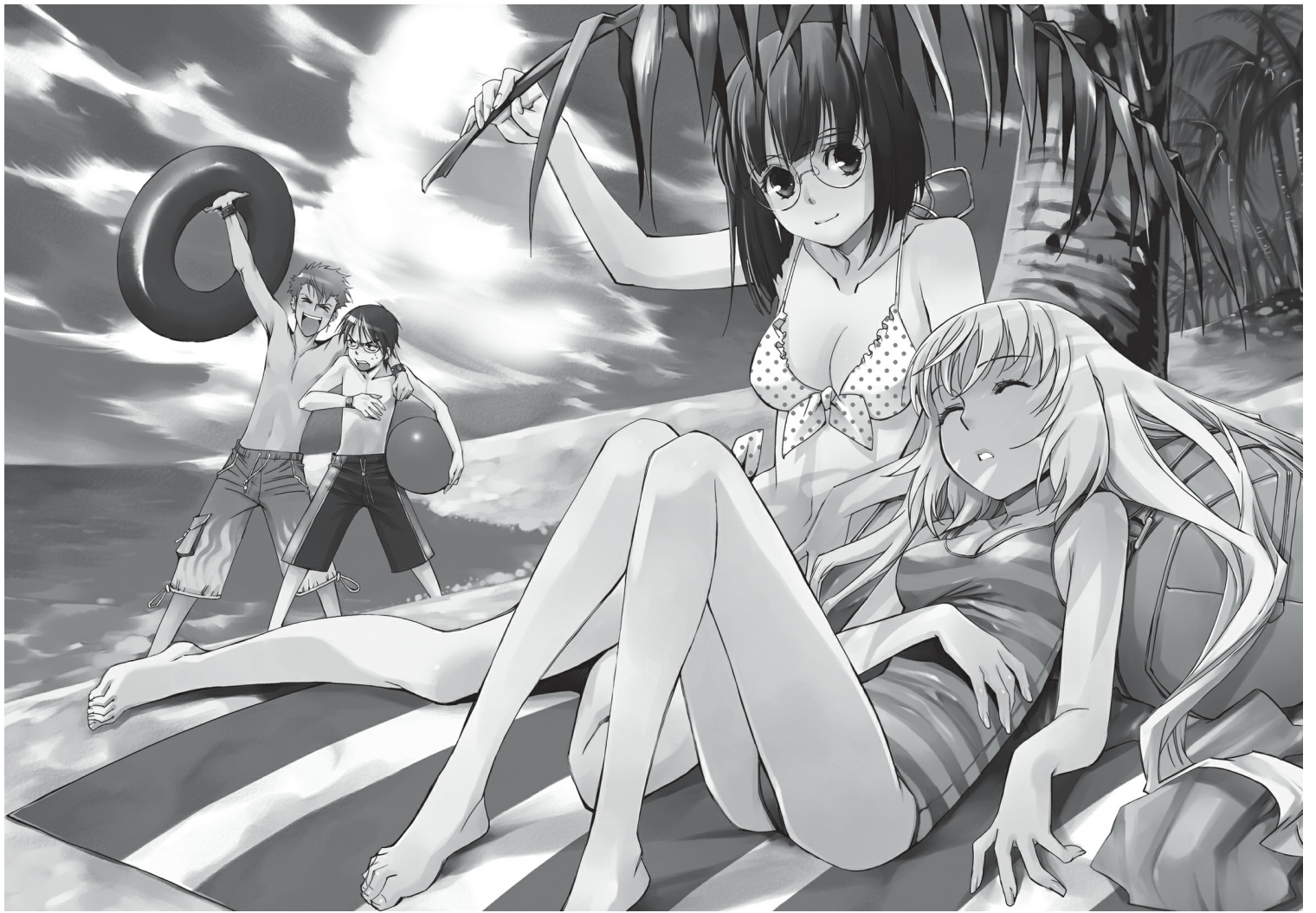


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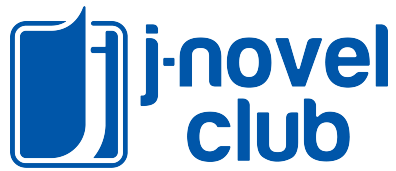
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Wild Times with a Fake Fake Princess: Volume 3

by Ichiro Sakaki

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